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METHODISM CAN BE BORN AGAIN
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METHODISM CAN BE BORN AGAIN

W. E. SANGSTER

THE METHODIST BOOK CONCERN
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SANGSTER
METHODISM CAN BE BORN AGAIN

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TO

"THE PEOPLE CALLED METHODISTS"

WITH

MUCH AFFECTION

AND

WARM GRATITUDE

BUT

IN DEEP CONCERN

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Methodism Can Be Born Again

Preface

IF a man believes that God has laid a message on his heart that he must deliver, he must deliver it as best he can. In my own small way, I would say with Luther, *"Hier stehe ich. Ich kann nicht anders. Gott helfe mir."* If these pages can have any part at all in reviving the spiritual life of Methodism, that would be a rich reward indeed.

I am indebted to my friends, the Rev. Dr. Harold Roberts, who read the manuscript, and to the Rev. Thomas Heppell, who read the proofs. The love and prayers of many other friends in different parts of the country, who share these concerns with me, have been a constant inspiration, though they might not endorse my statement of our common views in every particular. If any word I have written is wounding, or disloyal to the goodly fellowship of the Church, I crave forgiveness.

W. E. S.

LEEDS, ENGLAND.

I
Two Hundred Years After Aldersgate

ON May 24, 1738, John Wesley was converted in a room in Aldersgate Street. He had gone "very unwillingly," not knowing that his hour had come, and at about a quarter to nine his heart was strangely warmed within him. He says, "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine,* and saved *me* from the law of sin and death."

That was a great moment in the history of the world. In the strange scales of value that still obtain among us, battles and bloody revolutions seem of more significance than the hour of vision vouchsafed to a saint, and historians divide the ages by events of dubious importance, and label their "epochs" with the names of little men.[1] When history is seen as the travail of God to win the stubborn hearts of His earthborn children, and the only revolutions which are recognized as bringing no bitter reaction are seen to be spiritual revolutions, then will the day of Wesley's conversion shine with a greater luster than the day on which his relative triumphed at Waterloo.

Attempts have been made, even by some sympathetic biographers, to minimize the importance of this day in Wesley's life. Disliking the word "conversion," and

[1] Lecky is an exception. He calls the hour of Wesley's conversion "an epoch in English history."

feeling sure—despite the evidence of the New Testament —that God does nothing suddenly, they spread Wesley's experience of illumination over a period of years and deny tremendous meaning to May 24. Not much weight need be put upon this. One does not minimize the worth of any precious thing that Wesley learned before his conversion, when one insists on the uniqueness of that day. On May 23 he was an extraordinarily equipped man, of deep devotion, iron will, wide scholarship, and a not inconsiderable experience of life; but he was extraordinarily ineffective too! On May 24 he was an apostle! He left the room in Aldersgate Street, flung his leg across the back of a horse, and rode out to save England.

And not England alone! He rode through Wales and Scotland, and crossed the seas to Ireland many times. He was slandered, mobbed, stoned, spat upon, but never suppressed. He had his hours of depression and his moments of doubt, but he never went back on Aldersgate Street. At village cross and city square, on the wide common and at the pit head, he spoke a sure word about God, and offered salvation to the people. He called into being a troop of evangelical cavalry which carried the message of God's love into most corners of the three kingdoms, and when the members assembled for their Annual Conference, they assembled as scarred veterans of the Cross. John Nelson, who had been all but murdered at Acomb; Peter Jaco, who rode through many a riot, and not seldom lacked the bare necessities of life, "so that after preaching three or four times a day and riding thirty or forty miles," he often had no food, and was grateful for a little clean straw to lie on; Alexander Mather, whose first appointment was to the Epworth

Circuit, and who went to his duties the only way he could—*he walked* one hundred and seventy-one miles; John Furz, who was fired at while preaching on Salisbury Plain, the shot actually singeing his hair; Christopher Hopper, who was stoned at Newcastle, and William Darney, who was dragged from a house at Guiseley, and jumped on. Veterans indeed!

Nor did the message remain in Europe. At a word from Wesley, Francis Asbury crossed the Atlantic and lighted the flame in America. It spread like a prairie fire. When President Coolidge unveiled a statue of Asbury, at Washington, in 1924, he said, "He is entitled to rank as one of the builders of our nation." It cannot be denied!—though the eye of imagination can always see behind that statue the gallant company of roughriders whom Asbury led. Caleb Pedicord, who had been whipped so cruelly that he carried the scars to the grave; Freeborn Garrettson, who had been beaten to insensibility and imprisoned; Jesse Lee, William McKendree, Thomas Ware, and Philip Bruce. Of the first seven hundred Methodist preachers in America, nearly half of them died before they reached thirty years of age.

As the years passed, the flame was carried to Australia and New Zealand, to Canada and South Africa. Missions were planted in Ceylon and India, in China and Burma, in the West Indies and the South Sea Islands, in France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

No religious movement since the age of the apostles spread as did this. When Wesley died in 1791, there were more than 130,000 full members in England and America, and toward a million adherents. When Asbury died in 1816, the membership in America alone was 218,037;

today, in that one country, it is nearly 10,000,000, with more than 45,000 ordained ministers. In varying degrees of intimacy, world Methodism now embraces some 50,000,000 souls.

But a change has come over the scene. Two hundred years have passed away since Wesley was converted in Aldersgate Street, and the fire that once glowed with a great white heat burns low. Recent statistics are as dismally impressive as past statistics were startling in their triumphs. One turns over the sad record of recent years and finds a fearful wastage at work. Only in Overseas Missions does the glorious advance continue.

A similar blight has fallen on the youth organizations of the Church. The decreases in the church schools are positively appalling. The falling birth rate cannot account for all this. The loss in teachers and officers is not less alarming.

So the decline goes on and no sober observer expects a swift reversal. A child can easily foresee the ultimate outcome of all this unless it is stopped. The bicentenary of Wesley's conversion approaches and great celebrations have been planned, but, in all the rejoicings over the past, how shall we deal with these dark forebodings concerning the future?

Shallow optimists, no doubt, will mouth their bright platitudes, and rebuke us for our "pessimism." They are not to be tolerated. Optimism has some superficial resemblance to Christian faith, but it has no root. It is an insufferable counterfeit: it ignores the realities of the situation: it is bland, and fiddles while Rome burns; it will even deny that there is a fire! Christian faith looks the facts squarely in the face, and insists upon the

truth even when it hurts. It is penitent, and willing to believe that the situation may be owing in part to some personal sin, and will expose itself to the searching light of God. The future of Methodism demands faith that can move mountains, but the stupid optimists, if any survive, had better be killed off first. God can *do* something with the faithful, beaten to their knees, but who can manage the man who denies that anything is wrong, and thinks that all is well with Methodism because things are not too bad in his corner? The situation is grave. If God were not in it, we should call it desperate, and say that our backs were against the wall. And, lest anybody still thinks that it can do no good to dwell upon our losses, I can only say that I have directed attention toward them, not to create a spirit of defeatism, but only to defeat the spirit of cheap optimism. A general recognition of the gravity of the hour, and a humbling of ourselves before God, would help us all.

Other topics must then claim us. It is important that we inquire why this decline in Methodism has come about. It is necessary that we examine the attitude of those within Methodism who say that denominationalism is doomed, and who have no concern to preserve it. It would be honest if we looked at the contention of those who say that Methodism has become a vast machine, far too cumbrous for her waning spirit to work. Chiefly, we must inquire whether the essential message of Methodism is needed in the modern world, and whether it is the will of God that we gird ourselves to give it.

When I was a small boy I longed for June 18, 1915. I tried to imagine what London would be like on that day. I saw the city a blaze of lights and great processions

parading to Saint Paul's. All schoolboys, I thought, would have a holiday then! But the centenary of Waterloo came, and there were no celebrations. England was in the grip of a titanic struggle, and gross darkness was over all the land. Her fine sons were falling on the fields of Flanders, and the dread of air raids had extinguished every light.

The bicentenary of Wesley's conversion is at hand. Methodism was born on May 24, 1738. It is fitting that it be celebrated with dignity and rejoicing, but a sharp question is gnawing at our hearts. Can Methodism be born again?

II
Why This Decline?

IT was inevitable that the heavy loss in membership which Methodism has sustained, and the general decay of church attendance, should cause a great deal of discussion and evoke a variety of explanations. Many people have tried to explain the losses, and some have tried to explain them away.

A

1. Of this latter group are the simpletons who deride all statistics, and suggest that they are merely a pompous form of lies, telling us nothing. They prefer to test the health of the denomination by their own casual and unimportant observations, and if they have attended a couple of large rallies lately, they beg us to believe that everything is well with the Church, and all we need to do is to cast aside the spirit of defeatism and be bright. One wonders why Methodism has been keeping statistics since 1766, if they tell us nothing more reliable than this.

There *are* times when statistics can be ignored. A business man who has watched his figures falling for years might be forgiven if he waved them aside as irrelevant because he knew that he had now convinced the public of their need of his commodity, and was confident that subsequent figures would confirm his hopes. And a religious society could be cheerfully indifferent to a series of decreases in its membership, if it were certain that

it had undergone a spiritual rebirth, and, by being smaller, was better equipped for the task which God had laid upon it.

But who claims that about Methodism? The decreases are not forgotten because of the stirrings of new and vigorous life, as though God were pruning the promising tree, that it might bear more fruit. Rather do the branches appear to be dropping off for want of real spiritual sap, and dispirited ministers admit that, while they were ordained "to preach the Word of God and administer the holy sacraments," they really spend their time in a series of straining financial efforts to keep the thing going at all. Pert disparagements of the statistics must end. The figures mean *something*—and something very serious.

2. There is another group of "comforters" who make light of the figures by stressing their belief that these decreases are merely "cutting away dead wood." Their theory appears to be this: The ten thousand members lost must have lost all interest in Methodism, before Methodism lost all grip on them. To remove the names of people, therefore, who do not value their place in the Church is not serious, but merely "cutting away dead wood."

I confess that I cannot follow the reasoning. The bookkeeping of the business does not matter a button as bookkeeping, but how came ten thousand members to lose their love of the Church, to cut themselves off from the sacraments, and to leave the fellowship which mothered them in holy things? Preserving the metaphor of those who do not look upon our losses as calamities, I would counter their comment by asking, "How

did the wood die?" To the people who are unimpressed by the returns on the ground that we are only now getting *honest* figures (and that for financial reasons!), I prefer to make no reply at all. It cannot make any alteration in the present facts and it reflects on the past morality of the ministry in a manner abhorrent to me.

3. The similar plight of *other* churches is offered as dubious consolation in some quarters. An anxious reference to the figures is answered with the quick rejoinder "Other churches are as bad"—which might be true, but is no real answer to the problem, and is one of those perilous anodynes which prevent us doing anything about it.

No one suggests that this decline is only local, national, or denominational. Forces are working against religion over the wide earth. The hammer and sickle have ousted the Cross in Russia. From the steeples of certain German churches, the Cross has been removed for the swastika. I have myself seen in Istanbul the strange neglect of the mosques since Turkey went atheistic.

Nearer home, the eclipse of faith shows itself in less obvious ways, but most church leaders admit that organized religion is definitely on the defensive. Yet nothing can be more inane, and few things more dishonoring to God, than to accept the situation supinely and snatch a guilty comfort from the thought that other churches are as bad.

Moreover, it should be plainly stated to all who cuddle these excuses that converts are being made in the very hour when the dispirited say that it cannot be done, and that there is a longer line outside some shops said to be selling skimmed milk than can be found at the door of those who claim to have full cream.

B

Honest men, however, are not trying to explain the figures away. They accept them—and ask the deeper question, "Why are the people leaving the Church?" At least a dozen explanations are given, and most of them contain some element of truth.

1. The *War* is credited with causing a decay of faith. People who thought of God as a Being of caprice, supposing Him to respect our freedom at one time and conveniently rob us of it at others, were bewildered that He did not "stop the war," and save us miraculously from that hell of our own making. It is said that they left the Church never to return. Some pacifists believe too that the use of the pulpit for recruiting purposes seriously damaged the Church in the eyes of the world.

2. Changed ideas of the *Bible* explain the situation, say others. The pulpit grew unsure of the Book of God. At one time only four Epistles of Paul were felt to be authenticated, and the number of sayings of Jesus that could be "relied" upon were absurdly few. It was considered smart at one period to employ the precious moments in the pulpit to tell people what *not* to believe, and "having a smack" at obscurantism became a homiletical fashion. The bill came in for all that. For those scholars whose reverent researches have made the Bible a new volume to this generation we have nothing but gratitude, but we share the conviction that some responsibility for the decay of faith is to be laid at the door of those who lost the positive note in preaching, did their thinking aloud, and thought it laid upon them to give currency to the latest extravagances of German criticism.

Recent vagaries of "Form Critics" do not encourage the hope that this period is quite past.

3. *Counter attractions* on Sunday explain, in the judgment of some, the Church's lost influence. In former times there was not much to compete with the place of prayer on Sunday, in the thought of people who were not content to sit at home. Custom, and a sense of propriety, led people to worship who scorn it today as a useless convention.

Other occupations fill their hours. In winter, in many cities, the movie is enticingly open on a Sunday evening: in spring and summer hiking and cycling prove seductive to thousands of young people. Even the motorcar must bear its part of the blame. Many people buy a car and then conclude (often against the evidence) that Sunday is their only chance of really enjoying it. When the minister, missing them from church, utters some gentle rebuke, they say that they can worship God better in the country than they can in the dim religious light of a church. Experience goes to prove that people who worship God that way soon get down on their uppers (spiritually speaking), and, except for an occasional visit, the place of prayer may see them no more.

4. How much the radio has affected church attendance it is not easy to say. Many take the view that, while it has done immense good in constraining people to listen to the Christian message who never heard it before, it has also had the effect of lessening the keenness of others to be present at public worship. Some seem to have proposed this question to themselves: "Why drag to church to hear poor preaching, when you can sit comfortably at home, and hear it done well on the air?" Their critics

roguishly suggest that the habit has been strengthened in them by the absence of a collection!

At present there is no technical means of deciding what number of people are listening in to any particular broadcast program, but the many letters preachers receive suggest that the unseen congregation is immense.

5. Removal to different neighborhoods is a further reason suggested for the decay of church loyalty. In New York City, for instance, Protestants change their places of residence, on an average, about every three years. For many, old ties have been broken. The special social bond which linked the people of the local church together has been severed, and new ones have not been made. The stalwarts continued to come in from the suburbs and maintain the waning life of the central church, but each year it became harder. It would be some consolation to feel that old friends and adherents were linked up in the district to which they had gone, but in some areas no church has been provided, while for other people the social bond meant more than the spiritual, and when that was snapped, there was little left.

6. Nor does the list of "explanations" end even here. Some assert that our real contest is with *the spirit of secularism,* the old foe of faith, which is so hard to fight because it is more an atmosphere than a concrete enemy. Yet all men know that atmosphere can kill.

In December, 1930, there were many mysterious deaths in the valley of the Meuse. In the district of Engis alone, sixty persons suddenly and unaccountably died. Food and water were both suspected, but both passed the severest tests. Experts were called in to clear up the tragic mystery.

And this is what they found! Certain factories in the neighborhood had emitted large quantities of sulphurous acid gas. The temperature on the tragic nights was low, there was no wind, and thick fog. In such circumstances, the gas was transformed into sulphuric acid, and the many victims had died because they had been poisoned by the atmosphere.

So, it is said, does the atmosphere of secularism fill our modern life, choking, like some foul vapor, our every breath, and making religious life in this age peculiarly hard.

Nor should it be overlooked that there is a special danger in all this. When a man faces a plain enemy, he can brace himself to it, and pit his mind and arm against the foe. But you cannot pit yourself against a vapor! It defies the wit of any man to put the fragrance of a perfume back into the bottle—however cloying and sickly it may be. It is there!—in eyes and nose and throat one smartingly feels it, but, when you close your hand upon it, it is there no more!

It follows, alas, that some have ceased to fight. "The spirit of the age is against us," they say, "and we can only *wait* till better times come." They look sadly on our falling figures, but think that there is nothing to be done.

They half believe that things will get worse. Summarizing their view of the situation, they say, "We must be content with a remnant."

Yet even this does not cover all the efforts made to explain our weakening state. Men, whose chief interests are in social problems, accuse the Church of having no clear remedy for the teeming economic ills of the age, and

charge her with being a capitalist institution. They say that she is pitifully out of touch with the real needs of simple people, and their indifference to her message indicates that.

There are other charges. Some say that leadership is not in the most effective hands; that preachers use stale homiletical material; that distinguished men in the ministry have developed too keen an interest in fees; that there has been a loss in the power of prayer. In reply it may be said that leadership is always open to the one who can take it; that good sermons which are the product of flinty thinking *should* be repeated; that most of our ministers are trying to harmonize the claims of a career with the call of Christ; that the gateway to the path of prayer is never closed.

C

And now, I think, we have covered most of the "explanations" commonly given for the diminution of power in Methodism. No doubt there are others, but these are the reasons usually offered. They vary in importance. There is a good deal, perhaps, in some, and very little in others. The order of their importance is differently stated by different men. They have been argued about, compared, admitted, contradicted—and still the discussion goes on. It has gone on long enough! Diagnosis is not cure. If we continue to argue, and do nothing radical about it, there will be nothing to argue about at the end.

When the Manchester Corporation decided to enlarge their water supply and make bigger reservoirs, the little lakeland hamlet of Mardale was doomed. Necessarily,

the church was to share the fate of the hamlet, and discussions immediately arose as to what should happen to the church furnishings. Shap put in a claim. Carlisle pressed its point of view. A Consistory court was held. Argument countered argument. Finally, a delayed decision was reached.

And then they made a discovery! While the argument was going on, something else was going on too. Beetles had been eating the furniture—and the beetles had settled the matter before the lawyers and divines. There was, in fact, practically nothing to argue about. The Chancellor of the Diocese rounded the matter off by ordering a bonfire!

It must not be like that in Methodism. Endless discussions as to the true diagnosis must give way to some radical cure. We know enough to make a beginning. At least, we know enough to know *where* to begin. We must begin with ourselves. General criticism of "Methodism" must give way to clear, incisive and detailed criticism of a Methodist. Rigorous *self*-examination is demanded. When a man thinks he has "explained" the parlous condition of the Church by reference to the radio, Sunday movies, new building areas, or whatever other cause in our long category takes his fancy, he thinks also that the responsibility for the situation is not his, and that there is nothing to be done about it.

But does any honest man really believe that in the sum of all these causes a complete explanation of our position has been given? Is the passion, and loving strategy of God, which finds so compelling an expression in the Cross, going to be defeated by the hiking habit? God's arm is not shortened. The needs of man's soul are not

deeply different in the twentieth century from those of any other. We have yet to decide whether God has any major concern about Methodism as such, but it would be treason most foul to deny His longing to redeem.

On that dark betrayal night, when our Lord said to His disciples, "One of you shall betray me," John did not say, "Is it Peter?" Peter did not say, "Is it John?" They *all* said, "Lord, is it I?"

To that point, I believe, the grace of God is constraining Methodists at this time of celebration. The pew has been blaming the pulpit: the pulpit has been blaming the pew. The pew says that the preaching is lifeless and irrelevant: the pulpit says the people are absent or prayerless. Back and forward the blame has gone, and nothing will be done till the utter folly of this mutual recrimination is seen as folly, and pulpit and pew alike humble themselves before the Cross, confessing their *own* sins, and saying, "Lord, is it I?"

For when every allowance has been justly made for the various forces which have told against the faith of recent years, nothing is more certain than this—that our chief weakness has been *within* the camp; there has been a definite diminution of vital and personal religion; sin has had victory over us; many of us have been in the grip of moods and passions, with no more power against them than the people who do not know Christ—irritability, jealousy, crude ambition, ungenerous judgments, idle criticisms, unholy thoughts. We have largely lost our fathers' faith in heaven, and their fine scorn of death; both the hurry and the worry of the world have invaded our souls, and we have lost the peace and poise that belong to those who belong to God; the gay exuberance of primi-

tive Christianity does not shine from us. Small wonder that we cannot give this glad secret away: we have so little to give.

They tell a story in Scotland concerning Dr. Alexander Whyte, and his friend Dr. James Hood Wilson, of the Barclay Church. Some traveling evangelists came to Edinburgh for a mission, and fell to criticizing the resident ministers in the town. A man who was present called next day on Doctor Whyte.

"I went to hear the evangelists last night, Doctor Whyte," he began, "and do you know what they said? They said that Doctor Hood Wilson, of the Barclay, was not a converted man."

Alexander Whyte leapt from his chair in anger. His serene face went dark with indignation.

"The rascals!" he said, "the rascals! Doctor Hood Wilson not a converted man!"

The visitor was amazed to see a saint so furious. So he went on.

"That wasn't all they said, Doctor Whyte," he continued. "They said that *you* were not a converted man, either!"

What did he think would happen then?—that the angry man would be more angry still? If so, he was vastly wrong. Whyte stopped in his stride, all the fire went out of him, and sinking in his chair, he put his face in his hands. For a full long minute he did not speak.

Then, looking up, he said to his visitor with awful earnestness: "Leave me, friend, leave me! I must examine my heart."

That is how a man of God reacts to a spiritual challenge. He is not resentful. He does not ask who *you* are

to challenge him. In the light of God, he examines his heart.

To that point, I believe, God is drawing Christian men and women today. An increasing number are saying:

"I must examine my heart!"

"Lord, is it I?"

"Lord! Lord!!"

III

Is Denominationalism Doomed?

NOTHING seems clearer about the religious mood of the present time than that denominationalism is out of favor. Hardly anyone can be discovered who will defend the sectarian spirit. The sad story of religious schism is a pain to most people who read church history, and it is certainly a bitter taunt on the lips of the enemies of the faith. An institution with a record of disunity and uncharitableness hardly seems equipped for the task of teaching men to love one another.

This sorrow for the past and deep desire to escape its rebuke, expresses itself in various ways. It shows itself most impressively in the movement toward reunion. It influences our use of words, and explains the partial neglect of the word "Protestant"—that "nasty negative term" as it has been called—and the common use by non-Romans of "Catholic." It shows itself also in ways less pleasant than either of these.

Full of a desire to display the "broad" mind, and pathetically anxious not to appear too closely attached to one of the more popular fractions of Christendom, many people today delight to disparage their own communion. Loathing the very hint of dogmatism, and being much too genteel to criticize another branch of the Church, they criticize their own.

Methodists seem especially prone to it. "Where is there any real authority in Methodism?" a brother minister

asked me recently. It was a rhetorical question. He did not expect an answer. It seemed so obvious to him that there was no real authority in Methodism at all. I have recently met two local preachers, from both of whom I learned that they were found in a Methodist church only when they were to preach. On other occasions they worshiped, one with the Society of Friends, and the other with the Four-Square Gospel. There seemed no regret about it—even a touch of pride, I thought, in one of them.

During the discussions in the correspondence columns of the denominational journal on the alarming decreases in our church schools, an able minister among us contributed this: "I am sure that our task in the church schools is not first to think out how we can produce Methodists. . . ." One light in our dark sky! One thing to be sure about in all the vague uncertainty of our policy! We are not to think first of producing Methodists.

So I turned to the first Methodists to remind myself what a Methodist is. Wesley says:

"By Methodists I mean a people who profess to pursue (in whatsoever measure they have attained) holiness of heart and life, inward and outward conformity in all things to the revealed will of God; who place religion in a uniform resemblance of the great object of it; in a steady imitation of Him they worship, in all His imitable perfections; more particularly, in justice, mercy, and truth, or universal love filling the heart, and governing the life."

Now that is precisely what I *do* want to do. To this end I preach, teach, visit, interview people, write, argue, pray. A people who pursue holiness in heart and life! Inward and outward conformity in all things to the re-

vealed will of God! Justice, mercy, truth, universal love! Wesley goes on:

"If you walk by this rule, continually endeavoring to know and love and resemble and obey the great God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the God of Love, or pardoning mercy; if from this principle of loving, obedient faith, you carefully abstain from all evil, and labor, as you have opportunity, to do good to all men, friends or enemies; if, lastly, you unite together, to encourage and help each other in thus working out your salvation, and for that end watch over one another in love, you are they whom I mean by Methodists."

May God add to their number! If this definition does not mention everything I long for, it is there by implication. If it ends with what has become a denominational label, it is more catholic than much that passes as Catholicism. If any man tells me that thousands bear the name and do not merit it, I will answer that that is no reason why I should abandon the enterprise. Surely, I must work the harder to deserve it myself, and share it with others.

Let us look at the relation of denominationalism and catholicism more closely.

Are those people right who feel that any special nursing of denominational loyalties and distinctiveness is a disservice to church reunion? Can we only press on to the healing of His dismembered body by shedding the things which at present distinguish us? Will not the hand always be different from the foot, yet just as closely jointed to the body, and just as necessary to the doing of His perfect will? Is it not part of our firmly held conviction that the complete religion of Jesus Christ is a very

rich thing? And is it not a real injury to shed any precious part of it, in a hasty effort to think and speak the same? The hunt for the lowest common denominator in religion is a silly business, and the passion to be alike by being featureless is folly.

Most people have heard by now of the man who went into a restaurant and ordered lunch. When the waiter brought the soup, it was a poor, colorless and uninviting liquid, and tasted no better than it looked. So the hungry fellow called the waiter back.

"Waiter," he asked, "what soup is this?"

"No particular soup, sir," said the waiter. "Just soup."

"Ah," said the diner, as he gazed on the watery scene. "I see. And only *just!*"

And that little story has come back to my mind sometimes when I have met people who boasted of their emancipation from all denominations. They were neither Quakers, Romans, Presbyterians, nor Methodists. They worshiped where the fancy took them—and quite often it did not take them. They had no spiritual home, and a marvelous elasticity in belief. "No, I'm not a Methodist," they said, with a slight pursing of the lips—"nor anything else." Then, with a bright smile: "I'm just a Christian!" Under my breath I could scarce restrain the murmur, "And only *just!*"

Mulligatawny I know, and Scotch Broth (and it is all good food)—but *"just"* soup!

As I see it, the deepest longing for church reunion can live with the most profound affection for that branch of the Church which has mothered us in holy things. I find no disloyalty in my heart to the Church that is to be, when

I take delight in the distinctiveness of the Church that is. Alternate ways seem open to any man anxious to unite all Christendom.

A. He can seek to strip his Church of all things peculiar to her, and deliberately aim to be so like the people next door that only an historian can explain the difference. Fusion will come. It will come because the Church most keen for union will lose its *raison d'être,* and become so similar that nothing but a name will keep it distinct.

B. He can cherish, as a dear possession, those facets of truth which God gave to his branch of the Church, and bear it forward as a definite part of the whole glory which is yet to be revealed, seeking, in a spirit of charity, to understand what others have found precious in their communion, but not forgetting, as a good steward, that he has something to give as well as to gain.

Many Methodists keen on Christian reunion seem willing to buy it by any method. They are ready to sacrifice their distinctiveness, and a large part of it has already gone. Distinctively Methodist meetings have all but disappeared. When I browse in Wesley's *Journal,* I read much of love feasts, but I do not know what a love feast is like. I have heard much that was fine about them, but, in the more than twenty years I have been in Methodism, I have never had a chance to attend a love feast, while the decay of the class meeting is deplorable.

Still more important is the common omission of Methodist doctrine in preaching. Assurance is not pressed upon the people as the privilege of all believers. Have we come to doubt it ourselves? Are we conceding, by our silence, the contention of Newman that the whole thing is a delusion of the mind, and all that we can expect

to have on earth concerning our salvation is a "sober trust"? Christian perfection is preached only by the few, and they run a risk of being called "cranks."

Yet the deep elemental need to which Methodism spoke those sure words of God is still clamant in the heart of man. The hunger for certainty is still there. Response to the highest challenge in character can still be evoked. The desire for the intimate sharing fellowships of the class meeting is deeper than some suspect.

Moreover, if we are right in our supposition that some do not regret the loss of our distinctiveness in the belief that it will aid the triumph of true catholicity, their satisfaction is surely misplaced. Catholicity is one of the things that can always look after itself. To get near to God is to get near to those who are near to Him. It is a blessed by-product of the holy life. It need not be strained for, either by lopping off the characteristic differences of the denominations, or by copying customs, precious to others, yet learned for no deeper reason than the desire to be alike. If we all aim, with a single eye, to get near our blessed Lord, we shall get near to one another. The hill of Calvary is not as large as all that. Those who can touch the wood can touch each other. The saints have proved it. The saints will prove it again.

So I would put in a plea for Methodism. I hate this disparagement of our Church. I was not born in Methodism, but most things precious have come to me because of her. I would blush to utter one word of Newman's bitter irony or stinging ridicule, but all that he said in praise of the Church of England I would say of my Church—

"O mother of saints! O school of the wise! O nurse of the heroic! Of whom went forth, in whom have dwelt,

memorable names to spread the truth abroad, or to cherish and illustrate it at home! . . ."

Who would not love the Church which nourished him in holy things? Who would be so contemptible as to point out the wrinkles on his mother's face—some of which he put there himself? Are there not sweet things to say about her, and ponder tenderly on even more frequently than one speaks of them? Vulgar boasting about the size of this "great" Church, and how many new buildings she opened last year, leaves me cold, but—

> "Her sweet communion, solemn vows,
> Her hymns of love and praise."

What hymns! The rapture of them, and the nourishment in them! The way they soar; the rebuke, and the provocation of them! I thought I had never sung a hymn before when I sang a Methodist hymn for the first time. What glad certitude in them! What holy audacity! No service seems to me complete without, at least, one such hymn: and they stay in the memory, not by any effort of the will, but because they express so perfectly one's own experience (or at least one's yearning!) and give vent to all the deeper longings of the heart.

What fellowship too! One does not think first of big rallies, which may be only monster meetings, but of a dozen people round a fire talking intimately about the things of God. What confidences, and what wise words of counsel from those a little further down the road—simple people for the most part, some of whom know nothing about church polity and General Conferences, but who are indubitably sanctified. The refining fire had gone through their hearts.

And what hospitality! What a glad fulfillment of our Lord's word that we should receive in *this* time, "houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children"! How easily doors have opened to us, and how clear it has been, however simple the fare, that it was the best that love could provide! So it became a sacrament of fellowship, and fostered the intimacy of a Society which grew into a Church, but remained a Family still.

There is no vulgar boasting in our heart. We are too distressed by the decay of many of the most precious things in Methodism to feel jubilant about tomorrow. But, at a time when some people are so sure that we do not want to make Methodists, we may be permitted to think a few grateful thoughts aloud.

In the psychological jargon, so much in vogue today, no phrase has been more used, and overused, than "the inferiority complex." But its wide use witnesses to the fact that it stands for something real.

Not many people would deny that the worst consequence of this crippling sense of inferiority is not so much the depressing feelings of the subject himself, as the loss to the community of the glad service he might have rendered. It is impossible to compute the impoverishment of the world by reason of the gnawing thought men entertain that, in some way or other, they are not up to standard.

Institutions can be afflicted with inferiority too, and the world will suffer by it. Methodism has the malady. It shows itself in strange ways. We love to quote historians who concede that Methodism saved England from revolution, and we smart under the lack of literary recognition for Charles Wesley's hymns. We miss no oppor-

tunity of stressing our own contribution to scholarship, and are secretly proud of the increasing number of our ministers who are graduates. One has even heard apologies offered for Wesley's early helpers, in the ignorant supposition that they were unlearned men, though an astonishing number of them had Greek and Hebrew, and all of them were expected to give five hours a day to study.[1] If only this inferiority could be dissolved!

Methodism has a distinctive contribution to the Holy Catholic Church. It has been the fullest tide of God's Spirit since the Reformation. The urgent need of all Methodists who desire the reunion of Christendom is not first to copy the customs of others, but to preserve and enhance their own rich heritage. This is not to build barriers against sister communions: this is, rather, to enrich the Church that is yet to be by safeguarding the "grand depositum" which God has lodged with us. The whole Church is poorer in the decay of that intimate sharing fellowship which found expression in the class meeting, and all pursuit of holiness will be impoverished if the Methodists cease to understand their own doctrine of sanctification.

And if, in spite of our protestations, it still seems to some that the point of view we urge is mere sectarianism, we can do no more than give that charge a plain denial. We are lovers of reunion. We do not believe that God said His *last* word by John Wesley. We remember the dictum of our founder that we are the friends of all and the enemies of none.

[1] Compare Bett: *The Early Methodist Preachers,* p. 34f., where the suggestion is not only rebutted but shown to be absurd.

But we remember also that God said a *true* word by John Wesley, a word the world manifestly needs, and to the witness of which we have been called. We fear lest we be disloyal to it. We are not puffed up and advocating any stupid pride in being Methodists—though that kind of pride would be novel today. We just offer this simple and grateful prayer: "Lord, help me to be worthy of the Church in which Thou didst save my soul."

IV
Is Methodism a Machine or a Message?

THE word "Methodism" is commonly used in two senses, sometimes by the same person in the same speech, and without any apparent recognition of the double use of the term. It is used to indicate (*a*) an institution, an organization, a system of church order and government; and (*b*) a message, a body of belief, a glowing gospel, which has been proved in personal experience, and must be passed on.

It is not hard to show how the two came to belong to one another and to share a common term, and it is plain that at certain points they blend, and one seems to merge in the other. Nevertheless, seeking the core of meaning in both uses of the word, we see at once that they are distinguishable in thought, that they may be quite distinct in fact, and that their confusion has been a fruitful source of misunderstanding and bewilderment.

If anyone doubts the existence of this confusion, he can test it in a simple way. Let him listen to two equally earnest men commenting on the losses in our Methodist church schools, and it is more than probable that he will hear one say, "It is quite obvious that we must learn how to lead the children from the school to the church and make them into Methodists . . . ," while the other insists, like the minister quoted in the last chapter, "I am sure that our task is not to think how we can produce Methodists. . . ."

I have heard both those statements from honest and troubled men. On the surface there is a complete contradiction. In point of fact, they both want the same thing. One man is using "Methodist" in its rich, robust sense—its true sense, as I believe. He wants no child to pass through the church school without knowing the deep joy of personal religion, and he would constrain him into the fellowship of those who have already received this gift from God. The other dreads the development of people with a sectarian mind, absorbed in an organization which expensively does nothing. These men are not at loggerheads. They have simply forgotten the plea of old Socrates, "Define your terms." When they bandy the word "Methodist" about with such ease, they are talking of different things.

If any further proof is needed that we are unwittingly using our own name in this dual sense and to our great confusion, we need only the solemn reminder that the organization can entirely disappear, and the message still go on. Distinctive Methodist organization has disappeared in Canada. It is on the verge of doing so in France. It may soon be strange in South India. The loss is not, in itself, a heavy one. But if the message and experience went, then would go out a bright light in the candelabra of heaven on earth; the fires of Christian love and fellowship would surely burn less brightly, and something chill strike at the heart of all Christendom.

It will be clear from this that we are facing the age-old problem of the relation of a message to the institution which seeks to maintain and spread it. The propagation of any message seems to call, sooner or later, for some kind of organization. In the first spacious days

of a movement the organization may be so slight as hardly to be seen. Indeed, the glad pioneers may boast that they have none. But their successors will not be able to make that boast. It creeps in. It begins to make claims for itself. It uses the same name as the movement. In early days it remains an organ of the vital life, serving the purpose that called it into being; but it may continue to grow even when the vital life has begun to ebb, and finally become so dropsical that the spirit cannot move it at all. Then it is that a movement begins to boast its past, to look back wistfully to days when it was busy with its real purposes; and people fall to wondering how a machine, fashioned to do a certain work, should fail to do that work, and yet take so much time to be kept in running order.

I once knew a student who believed in system, and who devised a very elaborate system to retain the fruits of his thinking and, possibly, the gem-thoughts of other people, too. It included a card-index, a vast archive of newspaper-cuttings, several commonplace books and an elaborate file. It was all locked together by a network of cross-indexes. An expert on system told him that it was a triumph of the art. It had only one demerit—keeping it up left him no time to think! The means clogged the end. He envies now the man who lacks elaborate method but can startle his companions with an original thought.

Methodism is, to some extent, under this condemnation. The machine has become cumbrous. The maintenance of the institution saps the life of the best people and leaves many, even of those who have the inclination, too weary for the real work that Methodism exists to do.

E. G. Loosley in his little book, *When the Church Was*

Very Young, contends that the Church carried on its mission practically without any buildings, until the conversion of Constantine early in the fourth century. Through all those formative years her toil was unhampered with the problems and responsibilities that the holding of property implies. Philanthropy appears to have been the first claim made on the purse of early Christians, and after that the support of their workers. There is no evidence that they were ever exhausted by straining financial efforts to build a church, clear a debt, or provide a new roof because a beetle had eaten the old one. Certainly, there is no evidence that, when they did need money for the work of God, they got it by a succession of operettas and oyster suppers. Freed from the problems of accumulating property, may we not assume that they had time for the Church's spiritual task?

Today the first claim on Christian giving appears to be the support of the ministry, with the maintenance of the buildings a close second, and philanthropy a poor third.

Even that would not be too devastating if the ministers were able to give themselves wholly to their spiritual task. But things work in a vicious circle, and the efforts so necessary to maintain the ministry and the buildings, often absorb an undue proportion of the minister's time. Meanwhile, in Methodism, the buildings increase in the suburbs, while remnants of depressed people struggle to keep open redundant churches in the inner belt of the town. A minister of a large church said recently that he had not had twelve mornings in his study in five years, and explained the sad situation on the grounds of the "business" that went with his office. Another heard a plea for new methods in evangelism with a wan smile,

and said that he had known the joy of the evangelist himself in his early ministry, but for years he had been preoccupied with money-raising. An earnest circuit minister countered the same plea by pointing out that he had no less than *six* appointments in his pastoral care, none of which was negligible in any but a spiritual sense of the word. Some of them, indeed, watched the others with a jealous eye, lest the minister give more attention to another church than to them. "So I flit between them," he said, "sometimes getting in three meetings in one night, and most of them are mere meetings! It must be very nice to have unhurried time to deal privately with people's souls."

Are these instances typical? Are they not, at least, acute cases of a common complaint? Is it not easily possible to be busy all the time just "keeping the thing going," imprisoned in routine and almost mastered by the machine you were meant to master? If the machine were doing much, it would not matter greatly; but when the engine just turns over in a stationary car it is doing nothing but use the gasoline.

The intricate machinery of Methodism has been at work, but we have lost many members in recent years. Much good has been done doubtless—good that can never go into schedules and for which we are devoutly thankful to God; but that is no answer in itself to the solemn situation. John Wesley ever insisted that the supreme business of his helpers was to save souls: "You have nothing to do but to save souls." He even lapsed into redundancy in his Twelve Rules in order that there should be no doubt on what was to him the supremely important thing. "Observe," he says (in conclusion, and in repetition):

"It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care merely of this or that society, but to save as many souls as you can."

Those words came to my mind recently on hearing the comments of a minister on the activities of certain "life changers" who had been in his neighborhood. He could not deny their success, nor did he try. He marveled, and rejoiced, at incisive evangelism making inroads into paganism, but he was at some pains to point out that the "life changers," though laymen, *had nothing else to do.* For himself, he had to preach so many times, take care of this and that society, preside at this meeting, and get a chairman for that. He thought (earnest fellow that he was) that it must be fine to be a layman and have nothing to do but to save souls. I make absolutely no comment on it either way, but it is surely a ground for much thought that at a Conference of 1937 a minister who felt led of God to concentrate on life-changing, thought it right to ask to be *without pastoral charge.*

How odd that would have seemed to the early Methodists! It seems odd to some modern Methodists. But before they comment on the oddity of it, it would be well if they pondered on the way the Methodist machine can dominate even an earnest minister, how tearing busy he can be on unessentials: how crowded some church programs are with just meetings—meetings; how impatient certain members get if the minister does not appear at their particular hobby in the church, forgetting that a dozen other people have a different hobby, and expect the minister too.

All this has led some people to despair of reformation. They take the depressing view that institutions can *never*

be revived. "The new wine bursts the old bottle," they say. "God chooses a man big enough for the task and begins again." Wesley is cited, in his estrangement from the Church of England, and William Booth from Methodism.

I cannot share that view. One of the finest fruits of the Methodist Revival was its influence on the Church of England, little as that may be conceded in some quarters. The Counter-Reformation (or the Age of Catholic Restoration, as the Romanists prefer to call it) was a true revival of the Roman Church. They have not had a really evil Pope since.

Historians of the Society of Friends tell of a period when the Quaker witness was sadly weak, yet was revived. If Methodism has lost her true emphasis and passion, both may be restored. God will not withhold His grace from a people prostrate before Him, no longer boasting of the number of churches they have opened since John Wesley died, but waiting before Him, with souls compact of longing to receive power from on high.

A humble and a contrite heart, He will not despise. If all the people called Methodists, ministerial and lay, would humble themselves before the Almighty, not imputing blame to others but confessing their own sins; if it were clear to everyone that the revival of Methodism could begin at once in them—God would bend to such faithful expectancy and use us again. Even this cumbrous machinery, at which we have been railing, would hardly seem an obstacle. Sufficient power can move the mightiest machine. Parts of it, no doubt, would prove redundant, and other parts—the class meeting for instance—would appear no longer a quaint survival of the

pre-machine age but (in the words of Wordsworth) "the very *pulse* of the machine." Methodism would move into her third century spiritually alert.

But let us look more closely at the phrase we have just used, "waiting before Him." This phrase, and its equivalents, are much employed today. For the last five years I have missed no opportunity that has offered of asking the men who are leaders in Methodism what we are to do in our sad situation, and the answer that many of them have given me is just this: "Wait on God." One of them—for whom I have a respect amounting to reverence—said, "Wait *on God.*" That, and only that.

If, in the judgment of many able and devout men, this is the key to the situation, it would be well if we looked at the suggestion closer still.

To begin with, it is scriptural. Psalm 27 ends with this repeated plea, "Wait on the Lord."

It is, moreover, humble. It seems to put initiative where initiative belongs. Who are we to deal with problems so immense? Awed by their complexity, we can only bow before God and say, "We acknowledge *Thee* to be the Lord." Who warmed Wesley's heart in Aldersgate Street? Not Wesley. Not the man who was reading. Not Luther, though it was his preface. Not even Paul—though it was his Epistle. *God* warmed Wesley's heart. And how can we hope to find our way out of the modern impasse unless God opens it to us? Wait on God! So runs the argument—an argument I want to combat.

I suggest, with profound respect, that, consciously or unconsciously, what many people mean when they say "Wait *on* God" is "Wait *for* God." And "Wait *for*

God" can easily become "Leave it to God," and the next natural inference is that *we* can do nothing about it. So the years slip past, and the gates of hell prevail against us.

In what attitude of heart and mind are we waiting on God? Are we just desiring some intensification of feeling toward Christ? If that is our aim (and here I tremble lest I be misunderstood), our religion will become a cult, even though a Jesus-cult. We are all stressing today the importance of adoration in prayer, lest prayer become compounded only of petition, and all discerning people must surely rejoice in that emphasis in Methodism. What poor, thin, self-centered and shallow things our prayers become if they are not overarched with adoration! Lacking this, the people who follow the man who took all the world for his parish reverse his dictum, and pray as though their own petty concerns were all the world.

Yet even this wise stress on adoration has its danger. Contemplation may usurp the place of service. "Waiting on God" becomes simple passivity. The pendulum swings from the folly of intense and excited efforts to save the world without God, to the folly of absorbing meditation which leaves God to save the world by Himself.

I hold that in our waiting on God, simple passivity is not our whole part, and that our time is ill-spent if it is all given to our own relationships with Jesus. Adoration there must be: it will leap from the devout heart. Personal petition cannot, and ought not, be banned by any morbid fear that it is selfish. But, surely, as we wait on God, and think mostly of the needs of others, we ought to link ourselves with God's purpose in their lives, hold up their problems before Him, and seek to be His

colleague in their help. A *practical* consequence of our praying should be constantly before us, a commission from heaven which will usually have plain service as its content. The willingness of God to guide us ought to beget an expectation and a sensitivity to His word, and the normal program of our life should be sufficiently elastic to allow obedience to an unforeseen command. To our receptive minds it will become clear how we can touch other lives for Him, and become quietly but constantly active on the tasks of God. So our "waiting" will lead to "doing," and prayer and work be one.

Perhaps, for those whose hearts have not been warmed, nothing much remains but to wait on God till they are—but those who *have* felt and seen, ought with confidence to tell.

I propose this question to those whose whole advice at the present time is, "Wait on God." Suppose, after all, it is *God* who is waiting. Suppose the appeal of Jesus in this hour is just this: "Lift Me up! I will draw all men unto Me." Suppose God is calling us to a bold evangelical crusade, and waiting to bless our efforts richly. Suppose. . . .

To all that the Spirit of God might then lead us it would be hard to guess, but, in the meantime, those who feel the gravity of the times and the ineffectiveness of the Church, might ponder on the double use of the word "Methodism," and clearly recognize that the organization is a means, and that the means ought constantly to be challenged in the light of the end.

We have all laughed at the man who took a course of mind and memory training, and grew so proficient that he

could remember every large advertisement his train passed on the journey to town. In demonstrating his skill one day to his admiring friends, he got out of the train and left his bag behind him! He knew that Icilma followed Black Cat, but his private papers were two stations down the line! Some of us know so much about "running a church"; we wonder at times if we are quite so informed as to *why* a church should be "run." One still meets the amiable church official who thinks that it is a good thing to have a financial effort on. "It keeps the people together, you know." Imagine it! People redeemed by Jesus Christ, with a mission to all the world, needing a financial effort to keep them "together"!

Here, then, is a task for everyone who sees the need of it—that first things shall be first in Methodism; that religion is not just meetings; that the worship of God, the pursuit of holiness, the culture of the soul, and the saving of the people, shall be our chief occupation; that, however hard pressed the Church may be financially, spiritual things shall be at its center, and that we would rather close the doors than give the primacy to anything else.

V

The Significance of the Oxford Group Movement

ON few topics is Christian opinion more divided today than on the significance of the Oxford Group Movement. Some people discover in it an indubitable tide of God's Spirit, the revival for which a whole generation has prayed, the arm of God made bare in modern life. Others complain that there is too much hilarity and not enough humility and publish pamphlets to prove that it is a neat piece of the devil's handiwork, conceived, brought forth, and nurtured in hell![1] Between these two extremes, every variety of opinion finds place.

Distinguished theologians are at issue here. Emil Brunner[2] and Karl Barth[3] differ deeply about it, and it would carry us to the heart of the matter if we glanced at their difference. Doctor Brunner is a member and defender of the Oxford Group Movement. Doctor Barth feels compelled to choose between the Church and the Group, and declares himself "decisively for the Church and in no sense for the Groups."

Doctor Brunner argues that "if it is true that the Church exists wherever Jesus Christ is present in His Word and

[1] J. C. Brown. *The Oxford Group Movement. Is It of God or of Satan?*

[2] Emil Brunner. *The Church and the Oxford Group.*

[3] Article. *London Quarterly.* January, 1937.

His Spirit, then the question of the relationship of Church to Group Movement rests upon a fundamental misunderstanding." For him the Group is "the Church in attack," "a body of especially mobile troops," not usurping the functions which normally the Churches exercise in the service of Jesus Christ, but carrying on a conquering missionary work for them.

Doctor Barth is convinced that the way of the Church and the way of the Groups cannot be reconciled.

Doctor Brunner maintains that the Groups have recovered many things precious to Luther and essential to the Reformed Church—personal witness, voluntary but frequent and private confession (as taught by the apostle James), the service of laymen, and a rich intimate fellowship.

Doctor Barth sees some comparison between the Movement and the Jesuit Order, but hardly with the Christian Church.

Doctor Brunner is deeply impressed with the parallel between the Church in early days and the modern Group Movement. They are alike, he says, in the intensity of their fellowship in the spiritual life, in the activity of all the members, in worship, in their pastoral and missionary work, in the spontaneity and freedom of the rule of the Spirit, in the emphasis laid upon spiritual growth and the proving of faith by acts of love, in the dynamic of their expansion in the world and their penetration of the individual life.

Doctor Barth, on the other hand, contends that the Group Movement "is the latest attempt to secularize the Church" and that it would rob her of "mystery and spirituality." He will not even allow that its efforts

might supplement church activity. He says, "I do not see a supplement here: I see only a contradiction."

Set out in this way the difference looks stark. It is, in fact, *too* stark. In the opinion of the writer, Doctor Barth has forced a contrast that is not there. He sees a speckled apple on the branch, and denies that the branch belongs to the tree. He assumes an awful responsibility. He would unchurch a multitude newborn in Christ.

Look at some of the facts. For the purposes of an analogy that I want to draw it is important to decide whether this movement has, or has not, silently administered a rebuke to the Church, and whether it is not the will of God that, in humility of heart, we concentrate on those things now. No leader in the Group Movement claims perfection for it. They know more of its dangers, learned direct from God, than its confident critics imagine. "Loving and informed criticism," says Doctor Brunner, "can only do good to the Group Movement." It must remain "accessible to such criticism and thankful for it," even though some who proffer it need its rebuke more than it needs theirs.

He admits, moreover, the danger of moral pragmatism, the overemphasis on the "way," the overvaluation of that which man can do in order to come to faith. He knows the dangers of public witness and how "human vanity, superficiality, tactlessness, and untruthfulness can adulterate it." He admits that mistakes are made when confession of sin creeps into public testimony, and that "the limits of seemliness and edification are occasionally transgressed." He does not deny the difficulties of guidance, the clamant need for humility, nor yet the error

of any Groupers tempted "to regard the historical churches of having outlived their usefulness and grown obsolete." All this he sees. Frankness could hardly go further. The fruit is far from perfect. But he *does* maintain that it grew on a branch of the True Vine, and that the Husbandman will cleanse it, that it may bear more fruit.

Look at other facts. Doctor Barth does not well express the truth when he says that the Group "wishes to reform Christianity." It wishes to *quicken* and *enliven* it. If any Christian today is content with the life and witness of the Church as it is, and believes that our Lord is similarly content, no more need be said. If, however, he feels that a terrible impotence has laid hold of us, an awful creeping paralysis, not to be explained so much by the difficulty of the times as by our own limited consecration and insensitivity to the Divine Will, then he will welcome on bended knees any movement that will make him aware of the weakness, recall him to consecration, and quicken the enfeebled body of God.

That is what the Group Movement believes itself to be under God. It is a quickening movement of the Spirit. It is neither a church nor a sect. Though the liaison work is weak (for which the Group must take a full share of the responsibility) it seeks, at its best, to be the ally of every church. Hence it has no organization. Said Doctor Buchman, "Our only organization is the Church." It refuses to dispense the sacraments. The note of hostility to the established churches which has marked many evangelical revivals is not strident here. Doctor Brunner says, "For a movement in which the early Christian en-

thusiasm has again come to life, the temptation is great to pass unmerciful judgment on the churches in their present condition." But it is a temptation which the Movement, as a whole, has resisted.

Look at still further facts. It is not seriously denied by anyone who is informed on the subject that thousands of people—hundreds of thousands say some—have been called to God through the influence of this Movement. Multitudes utterly untouched by the normal ministrations of the Church have been arrested, challenged, changed. The methods employed have been novel—so novel, indeed, that it is not surprising that they have sometimes been opposed. There is a revulsion on the part of some people from what appear to be American business methods applied to religion, but when all has been said in criticism, this remains: pagans have begun to pray. Skeptics are reverently searching the Scriptures. The careless are coming to church and taking communion. Men newborn in God are seeking to win others to Him. Worldlings have accepted new values, and now talk of "getting on," when they are given victory over sin, or grow in some coveted virtue.

Time will tell. The dying down of controversy on the topic shows that most people are leaving the matter to the test of Gamaliel. "If this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown: but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them." Yet a tepid and detached interest hardly seems enough in the circumstances. There are things to be learned while the ultimate effect of the Movement is still in doubt. The vexed question of the relation of Group to Church, and whether or not "changed people" stand, and how long the Movement

can avoid organization, and whether Groupers get strained and more frequently break down than other Christians, and how long it can continue without a fuller intellectual statement, and how far the Movement can affect slums and modern industry, could *all* be left for time to tell, but some things are plain now. It is plain that converts can be won even in the age when many said it was impossible. It is plain that there is an appetite for spiritual things even among pagans. It is plain that brave and sane confidence is possible in an age of despair. It is plain that the ideal of personal holiness can excite ambition in the most unlikely. If the Group Movement did no more than that, it would have done a great deal. It has confounded the hopeless, who pointed to Sunday movies and the hiking habit and said, "We are beaten." However serious, in the minds of some people, the objections may be to this Movement, can any honest man deny that it is a challenge and a rebuke to the Church? However sure a man may be that God does not want him to leave the Church and become a spiritual free-lance, he must be just as sure that God requires a higher quality of life in him, and a more effective service. Methodists ought especially to feel it. Students who are intimate with the early history of Methodism, and familiar with the Group Movement, have often remarked on the similarity. There are some not unimportant differences, but the similarities are striking. Many of the features of early Methodism are characteristic of the modern Group Movement, and not characteristic of modern Methodism. It may be a clue to us in our search for an answer to the question, "Can Methodism be born again?" If we can decide what was typical of Methodism in her spacious

days, and mark its absence in modern times, and if those same features are present in the Group Movement, and explanatory of its power to help, then we shall be confirmed in our diagnosis. The disease will be understood and the way of recovery no longer obscure.

Some Methodists object to the Group practice of "sharing." Little as they appear to realize it, their real quarrel is with John Wesley.

It was Wesley who, in his rules for "Band Societies," said:

"The design of our meeting is to obey that command of God, 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed.'"

"To this end, we intend . . . to speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, and deed, and the temptations we have felt, since our last meetings." . . .

"To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sin, and temptations."

"Some of the questions proposed to everyone before he is admitted among us may be to this effect:

"Have you the forgiveness of your sins?

"Do you desire to be told your faults?

"Do you desire to be told all your faults, and that plain and home?

"Do you desire that every one of us should tell you, from time to time, whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?

"Is it your desire and design to be on this, and all other

occasions, entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart without exception, without disguise, and without reserve?"

No Grouper ever put it more trenchantly! Faced with such a dilemma, the modern Methodist usually goes back on John Wesley, and escapes from the impasse by half apologizing for the Founder, and suggesting that his rules were too strict. It is a costly evasion of a serious issue. Yet it is not upon that that we would dwell now. Our concern, at the moment, is with Methodism, and God's will concerning its life and work. That He has a will for Methodism we are convinced. Those who have decided to the contrary will not be reading this, but much prayer and thought have convinced us that God has not deserted this branch of His Church. Its thousands of obscure saints witness to His presence. Some of the finest fruit of the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century appeared in other churches, and we believe that it is the will of God that Methodism be born again in this age. It has learned much in two hundred years. If it can discover again its genius for fellowship, its exuberant yet humble assurance, its passion for purity and personal evangelism, this, together with what it has learned in a couple of centuries, would make it again a vessel meet for the Master's use.

Let us look at each of those characteristics in turn. They belong to essential Methodism—and they have appeared again in this new tide of spiritual life. All four have been lost, in their rich sense, in the Methodist Church of today, and all four must be recovered. This, as it seems to the writer, is our guided way.

1. *Fellowship* was a feature of Methodism in its spa-

cious days—intimate, warm, and family fellowship. Members met weekly in class, and under wise leadership (which was largely left to the laity), they built each other up in the faith. To our spiritual loss, rallies have been substituted for class meetings in recent years. Intimate fellowship is not possible in large meetings, and a silent multitude listening to a lecture or address does not grow religiously as rapidly as will eight or ten people sitting together and talking freely of their spiritual experience and aspirations, and of how God has dealt with the saints. The decay of the class in Methodism is a tragedy which the denominational historian will find it hard to exaggerate. It was a school of life. At the bidding of God the member could make it a confessional. It made a man vigilant in prayer, watchful for temptation, keen to learn of those who were farther on, and it kept the emphasis where the emphasis ought to be.

But Methodism let it slip. Fellowship was sought in other, and less fruitful, ways, and now there are hundreds of churches with no classes, and our records are littered with the names of such meetings which never meet at all!

Yet the hunger which the class deeply satisfied was still there, a hunger which could not be met in public worship or in mass meetings. Finally, it burst out in "groups." Methodism had failed to justify its commission, and God met the need another way.

So this first question presses powerfully upon us:

Can Methodism recover fellowship?

2. *Assurance* was characteristic of early Methodism. It echoes in all its typical hymns. The plaintive note of Newman, in his pre-Roman days, is poles apart from a

normal Methodist song. "Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom," would have been no fit melody for the "ransomed sons of grace." They sang:

"Now I have *found* the ground wherein
Sure my soul's anchor may remain."

The wistful note of Whittier, who thinks that God likes to keep a distance from His loving children, and quaintly sings,

"Forgive me, if too close I lean
My human heart on Thee,"

would have had no place in the repertoire of those who sang, "We *know,* by faith we surely know." Their characteristic song was tuned to this:

"What we have felt and seen
With confidence we tell,
And publish to the sons of men
The signs infallible."

A great confidence in God was characteristic of the early Methodists. It was confused by their critics with pride and presumption, and scorned as being a matter of "mere feeling." It was never a matter of "mere feeling." It was robust faith, building on the firm facts of revelation. The pioneers of the Evangelical Revival never began a sermon with the phrase beloved by modern preachers, "I feel I have a feeling which I feel you feel as well." Their note was positive, incisive, and confident. In a confused world they were sure.

Methodism has lost that note. The only thing it is sure about is that it is not sure. The defeatism of the world has invaded the sanctuary. Small wonder that the people do not turn to it in this despairing age.

Yet the hunger for a sure word from God is still insistent in men's souls. "O that I knew where I might find Him," echoes from a million hearts.

This, then, is the second question to which we must turn:

Can Methodism recover assurance?

3. *Holiness,* and its methodical pursuit, was a great preoccupation of the early Methodists. Sometimes they used the term "sanctification," and sometimes "perfect love," but the aim was constant throughout. The spread of this particular message seemed to John Wesley the chief reason why God had raised the Methodists up, and he insisted that the presence or absence of this teaching could serve as an index anywhere to the health of the little societies.

But Methodism has long lost this emphasis. Serious difficulties in the explanation of it confronted the theologians, its severely personal stress brought down the just rebuke of those interested in social questions, and who denied that sanctification can ever ignore the problems of community, and soon a major doctrine of Methodism was left largely to the underworld of the denomination, to little groups of people who claimed to pursue "holiness," but the groups got smaller and smaller, and more censorious the smaller they got.

Yet the longing for the highest is deep-set in the heart of man, and it has become vocal again in the Group Movement. Groupers challenge their own souls, and other people's, with this fourfold demand: "Absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, absolute love." It is only the phraseology which has changed, and it is

fatuous to debate which wording is better. What is the deeper thing that this new hunger for holiness is saying to us? Is it not patent that there is a yearning in the heart of man for the heights, and a great call for experience and leadership on this path?

So we come to our third question:

Can Methodism recover her passion for holiness?

4. *Personal evangelism* was a keen concern of original Methodism. Dr. George Osborn once gave it as his considered opinion that no one phrase better described the pioneers of the Revival than this: "Oh, let me commend my Saviour to you!" Not the preachers only but *all* Methodists admitted the responsibility of passing the glad news on, and the way the Revival spread in the latter half of the eighteenth century proves their loyalty to the task. Students of Methodist statistics have often commented on the fact that the spread of the Movement was far more rapid in the days prior to mass meetings and visiting evangelists than in subsequent years, and the reason is not far to seek. The commendation of the Saviour was not left to the ordained or the specially gifted. Everyone in whom He broke the power of canceled sin was charged to keep the secret by giving it away. So it spread.

But Methodism has lost that missionary passion. The ordinary member of the church does not feel that this responsibility is his. In many instances he doubts if he has anything to give, or else he feels embarrassed at the thought of speaking to someone else about the intimacies of religion, and defends himself against a restive conscience by pleading that these are *very* private things. The fact that he argues about it at all proves his poverty.

A man rich toward God and living among paupers cannot keep dumb. As he listens to the voice from above, he knows to whom he must speak, and runs on his errands with willing feet.

And this passion for personal evangelism has come back with the Groups. Those who are changed are expected to change others or, rather, to place themselves under God's direction for that end. The Groupers say, "If you are not winning, you are sinning." How easy it is to pick flaws in the phraseology, but how hard to escape the challenge at the heart of it!

So we come to our final question:

Can Methodism recover her zeal for personal evangelism?

To a detailed answer to these questions we must give ourselves now, and the next four chapters will consider each of them in turn. An affirmative answer to each question would give us ground for saying, "Methodism *can* be born again."

VI

The Recovery of Fellowship

"FELLOWSHIP" is a fine word, but it has been sadly defaced. It has been misused, and overused, so much that it is doubtful if it can ever be minted afresh, and that glorious sense of "togetherness" made central in its meaning once more.

It must be admitted that the word is used with some variety of meaning even in the New Testament. It is employed both to describe our relationship with Christ and our relationship with one another. It began, in this double sense, when our Lord appointed twelve "that they might be with Him," and it was a much-loved word of Paul's, who called his friends "fellow worker," "fellow prisoner," fellow servant," "fellow traveler," "fellow heir."

It may be that the word lost its sharpness because of this variety of use. Vivid as it appears to have been to the apostle, it was obviously a word of degrees that its blurred development might have been foreseen. A fleeting and loose fellowship is possible among people who travel together in a train, but the moment the word begins to be used in describing that kind of contact its robust meaning loses vitality and withers away. But Paul meant something infinitely richer than casual contacts. When Jesus started the Christian Society by choosing twelve men who were to live, not only in Him but in one another, He was not drawing them into a superficial acquaintanceship but into a family life that was to be costly, intimate,

and amazingly deep. That is the sweet, nutty kernel of this splendid word. That is the precious thing we once had in Methodism and sorely need to recover.

It hardly needs to be stated that the very limitations of our human minds prevent intimate fellowship with more than a few people. The wider the circle is drawn, the looser the bond and the less rich the fellowship. The interrelation of life and love which is seen at its best in the family life of home gets gradually less close through the widening circles of friends, colleagues, the city, and the nation, and barely exists at all in any manner co-extensive with mankind.

Yet it cannot be denied that the tie of blood relationship is to some extent fortuitous, and may indicate no affinity of mind at all. To grow up at the same hearthside is no proof that the same fire will burn in each heart, and the same ideals be cherished. Brother often drifts away from brother. The heart of one sister may grow chill to another. Jesus did not conceal the fact that His gospel would divide families, and set a man at variance against his father, and a daughter against her mother. In the kingdom of God on earth the bond that mattered most would be the common faith, the common experience, the common Lord. Whosoever did the will of God would be His brother and sister—and mother! The family life of believers would cut across the accident of parentage, and be composed of those who had made the same surrender, and were committed to the same cause. In these small cells of vital spiritual life, the deepest fellowship would be realized. Living within the larger Body of the Church, on whose strength they draw, in part, for sustenance, and to the maintenance of which

they give their life, these small organisms would grow in spiritual power, and make possible the highest life of the members composing them. The word "fellowship" can only be known at its best in this relationship. Above the handful, fellowship necessarily loses depth. There is fellowship of a real kind when the whole local church meets for worship, but it is a different fellowship. Rich reciprocity is not possible: the interplay of minds is limited: a multitude of people cannot live in each other's lives: we are facing again the limitations of human nature, and must recognize that fellowship gets thinner the wider it spreads.

In its early days Methodism had this intimate fellowship in an extraordinary degree. It was, indeed, an organism *composed* of such vital cells. The honeycomb is a not unfitting simile—cellular and yet united—and the simile still holds, even in its failings, because you come to the edge and it leaves off. Critics discerned something clannish and exclusive in Methodism: they called it "self-contained and self-centered," but let us look, for the moment, at the cells themselves. They called the cells "classes," and every member met in class. Every member was encouraged, though not dragooned, to be vocal, and let the little fellowship know of his struggles, his defeats, and his triumphs. Social distinctions were not recognized. Laymen of spiritual gifts were called to leadership, and it sometimes happened that the employer in the commercial world met in class under the leadership of one of his own employees. The writer remembers an instance of a large employer of labor whose class leader was also his storekeeper. The storekeeper was the older man, but the relationship never seemed odd, and the lov-

ing frankness of the leader was matched by the meekness of the member. In these little groups the spiritual quest was pursued with passion. Holiness was the aim, a holiness which was often too individualistic, and ignored social injustice, but which necessarily carried the seeds of this wider interpretation of the gospel in it—seeds that were to grow in subsequent generations. The equality of family life prevailed. Prayer, praise, confession, witness, teaching—all had their place. Members were expected to speak. It was felt to be dishonoring to God to be dumb in His praise, disloyal to the fellowship not to give as well as get, and dangerous to the soul to stifle confession when the Spirit of God moved one to it. So they grew in grace and exulted in a fellowship, so rich and deep, that differences of age, learning, and social standing were as nothing to them, and these golden hours became an "antepast of heaven." Their faces shone as they sang,

> "And if our fellowship below
> In Jesus be so sweet,
> What heights of rapture shall we know
> When round His throne we meet!"

Now, it cannot be seriously doubted that God has put in our hearts a hunger for this intimate kind of fellowship. The need is felt even in churches where it is not satisfied. Writing of the Church of England, the Bishop of Durham says:

"We need desperately the recovery of spiritual fellowship. . . . The gulf between the cultured class and the uncultured multitude remains a formidable obstacle to religious fellowship. . . . Precisely where those isolating forces born of pride and greed ought to have been overcome and put to shame, they have found their frankest and most in-

sulting expression. The very aspect of the hallowed fabrics was eloquent of class domination. Close to the altar, sometimes, as in the old parish church at Whitby, almost hiding it from public view, stood the ample pew of the landowner, while at remotest distance, or in the bleak obscurity of the gallery, were crowded together the narrow and comfortless benches of the laborers. In the interval, in graduated prominence, were the seats of the farmers and shopkeepers. The spirit which thus uttered itself within the house of God has survived the social system which it inspired. What hereditary subordination did for the poor, the haughty reserve of their class did for the rich, viz. cut them off from spiritual fellowship with their brethren in Christ. Discipleship in the modern Church has too often ceased to be the guarantee of brotherhood, and become a secret of the individual, which is rarely acknowledged and never shared."[1]

It may be that Methodism, owing to the decay of the class meeting, runs the risk of a similar fate. There is more than a danger that discipleship will become the secret of the individual, a secret rarely acknowledged and never shared. This silence is, indeed, being commended by some who need to be reminded of Wesley's dictum that the New Testament knows nothing of a solitary religion. The recovery of *this* kind of fellowship is our need. Mass meetings may have their uses, but it is fellowship spread out so thin as not to be fellowship at all. Nor can social groups help us here. Their devotional meetings are usually occasions when someone gives an address, or two or three people read papers. The social, musical,

[1] H. H. Henson. *The Group Movement,* p. 80f. By kind permission of the Oxford University Press.

and literary evenings are compounded of entertainment and a little culture. This is not to disparage the social group. It is still a wide doorway to the Church and one of the easiest ways to slip in. But it is a doorway!

The question not unnaturally arises, How did the class meeting decay? and it would be folly to suggest that the Church, at any time, wantonly threw away a precious thing. There were reasons for it. The fire of the Revival began to abate, and Methodism without a glow at its heart soon ceases to be Methodism. Its typical institutions all require warmth if they are to live at all. The supply of lay readers was not maintained, and more and more classes were mistakenly led by ministers. People began to repeat the same "experience," almost in the same words, and their witness became tedious. Add to this the insidious appeal of counter attractions, and allow for the growing taste for entertainment, and the mystery is a mystery no more.

Yet the hunger the class satisfied has been satisfied no other way. Entertainment is seductive but never deeply satisfying. There is no weariness like the weariness of overstimulated nerves, and it is not in the power of mere amusement to meet the hunger of the soul. Intimate fellowship with God and a few other people—that is our need. Richly fed in such society, one need not sink into quietism but stride out boldly to serve the present age.

It has been the experience of some of us, who share these convictions, to see the class revive again. Using, perhaps, another name to describe the meeting, we have offered an intimate sharing fellowship to the people, fostering, where possible, lay leadership, and keeping to the very marrow of our message, and the people have risen

to it like "hungry trout in the cool of evening." Allowing for the variety of circumstance which may compel men to approach their own situation in their own way, we believe that this could be done in most of the churches of Methodism.

Sometimes we have used our homes. There is a freedom and informality in the home not easily found in the snuggest church parlor, and there is, moreover, no need to watch the clock out of consideration for the caretaker. When the others have gone home, the man whose burdened heart will no longer brook delay, can linger behind and tell his story. It takes time, and confidences cannot be hurried, but time does not matter now. At this late hour even the telephone has ceased to ring, and one can give one's whole mind to the immediate problem and offer to a man, whose defenses are all down, power over sin and new life in Christ. What memories of midnight conversations crowd into the mind as one looks back —magic hours in which new fires were lighted in the heart, even as we watched the dying embers sink in the grate, new surrenders and solemn vows!

And all this is but the by-product of the fellowship—the afterglow: in the hour of general witness and conversation, of question and answer, of seeking and finding, what nourishment! what vision! and what resolves!

But the largest room in the house may soon prove small, and another method of offering this kind of fellowship on a larger scale, and on the church premises, may be explained. The writer meets some hundred and fifty people each week who are eager for this thing. They are given notice on Sunday of the question they will consider on the following Friday, and they come with prepared

minds. All meet together for a simple act of devotion, and a few terse sentences open up the question. It may concern methods of prayer, or problems of Providence, foundations of belief, or Biblical exposition. With a simple reminder that discussion is no end in itself, and that we are people committed to a crusade and should be willing to witness, the company disperses into the dozen groups of which it is composed and, under a lay leader, they share their experience with one another and get help as they give. In a group of twelve or thirteen people, who soon become friends, the most nervous finds it possible to utter an opinion or slip in a question, and few remain dumb as the months go by. There is no effort to keep people of the same age together, but those with more spiritual experience unconsciously help the ones with less, and freshness and vitality are maintained. After forty minutes of this directed conversation and witness, all reassemble again in the larger room and each group gives the briefest report of the light that came to them, and mentions any questions that still perplex. From this the minister selects the points that are specially helpful and emphasizes them, answers such questions as can be answered, and summarizes the positive gains the evening has brought. Quiet and prayer bring the fellowship to a close.

Such a method is familiar enough to people who have been to conferences and retreats. The point of its explanation here is that it seems not to be generally realized that it can be a regular part of normal church activity and a means whereby the decaying fellowship can be recovered. In such a company, those who listen to God constantly find Him guiding them to private conversation

with individual members, and a rich opportunity for personal evangelism is given. The joy of being on the Father's urgent business fills the heart, and one is no stranger to the peace which belongs to those who know that they are doing the Church's chief work.

Elsewhere the Methodist class meeting is being revived on strictly traditional lines, though it is keenly felt by those who are working this way that success will only endure under trained leadership—men and women of grace, keen minds, and fervently pastoral hearts.

But we are not tied to a method. How it comes we do not much care, but God knows how much we long that it come! For this deep fellowship almost any effort would be worth while, and in this deep fellowship the revival of the Church could be born.

VII
The Defeat of Defeatism

"DEFEATISM" is not a pleasing word, but it is a popular one. Its wide use indicates its serviceableness to those who want to describe the strange temper of the times, a compound of doubt, depression, and hopelessness. All spheres of life are infected. Statesmen feel it. They want peace, but they are so sure that they cannot get it that they bend their whole strength to the preparations for war. Economists feel it. They dread a slump in trade, but they have no confidence in their ability to avoid it. Doctors feel it. Lord Horder said recently: "All is not well with the family doctor. . . . He has lost caste. . . . He must change his own attitude of defeatism." The Church knows the malady too. I talked with a layman recently who has given all the leisure of the last twenty years to sustain a waning cause in the inner belt of a large city, and looking back over the years he felt that the strain had achieved nothing. "We've kept the doors open," he said. "It has been an awful struggle, and it has left us neither time nor strength for really spiritual things. I asked myself the other day what we had achieved, and I could only conclude that we had done nothing but keep the minister and the caretaker!"

Some ministers are in the same slough of despond. Sharing their problems with me recently, some young men raised the question as to whether the Church, as an institution, was under sentence of death and if, with their

life before them, they ought to remain in the ministry. They appeared to think that any efforts to resuscitate it was "painting the ship while she goes down."

But how remote all this sounds from the spirit of the New Testament!—and how strange among the people who recovered, for all Christendom, the Pauline doctrine of assurance! Concerning this doctrine Doctor Denney said, "Speaking broadly, we may say that in Romish churches it is regarded as essentially akin to presumption; in the Protestant churches it is a privilege or a duty; but in the New Testament it is simply a fact."

It was simply a fact in early Methodism. Wesley guarded it, expounded it, battled for it, and rejoiced in it —and "the people called Methodists" rejoiced with him. They lived in days of vast uncertainty, of civil strife, of colonial disruption, and the threat of foreign invasion, but nothing could dislodge their certainty. It was not *based* on their feelings, though it mightily affected them. It was based on the facts of revelation, and their experience of God in Christ.

Nothing would so defeat the defeatism of the present times as the recovery of Christian assurance. God is longing to meet repentance and surrender with absolution and the seal of sonship, and to guard His children's peace in a distraught world. Dr. H. B. Workman says: "Once let Methodism as a Church lose this note, and its historic justification has perished."[1] We believe it. But who would say that Methodism has the note of assurance today?

[1] Townsend, Workman, and Eayrs. *A New History of Methodism,* p. 27.

Or look at it from another angle. Listen closely to the men who still feel that they have a word for us in these perplexing times, and how many of them fail to display any confident assurance themselves! They try to whip up a quick keenness for some new "adventure," or "challenge" us to embark on some new "quest." Perhaps it is a proof that we are no longer adolescent, that we have grown weary of these constant incitements, and are seeking for certainty rather than a new thrill.

Not that we have no use for the word "adventure" at all; but it is only *some* kind of adventure that we want. We ache to get right past the need to go in quest *of* God, and we want to exhaust all our passion for adventure in a quest *with* God. The difference is immeasurable. The word "adventure" belongs only to this second kind of quest. The other thing is not an adventure; it is a nightmare. A true adventure requires confidence at the heart's core, and a degree of detachment from cares that come too closely in. In a true adventure the element of fear is only a condiment at the feast; it must not maintain itself in the central place. That is why these parsons and social workers who spend a week or a fortnight on the road, and try to share the plight of the unemployed by sleeping in a casual ward or a "flophouse," may justly describe their experiences as an "adventure." When they go farther and claim that they have identified themselves with these men, and really *understand* their position, they are talking utter nonsense. These adventurers know quite well that if the worst comes to the worst, however little money they have in their pocket, they can go to the post office, or the police station, and wire for a few dollars. It is beside the point to say that they do not do it. They

could do it, and the real tramp cannot—and that makes all the difference. One is an adventurer; the other is a vagabond. One can enjoy the delight of doing the daring thing; the other walks numbly on, wondering where he will find something to eat. One can set an end to his exile; the other sees it stretching on forever.

That puts the points fairly well so far as this spiritual quest is concerned. We do not want to be religious vagabonds all our days, living on the scraps that we pick up as we go along, but with a great big fear in the forefront of our mind. We want that core of confidence, and central certainty, which the true adventurer enjoys. We are prepared to say with the hymn writer, "We go in quest," if we may say as swiftly as he does, "Still Thou art our abode," because, then, we shall feel that it is not just one quest after another, but that, when the fires of life burn low or sorrow overwhelms us, we need not go in quest at all; we may stay at home for a while—a home rich with every comfort, and utterly satisfying in the certitude of the Father's presence.

Yes, that is what we want—what we *wanted*, we ought now to say. Looking back, it is perfectly clear that it had some merit to be honest with our own hearts, and to make our needs vocal to ourselves. It made us face such acid questions as these: Does God intend that we be wistful all our days? Does He love us, and forgive us, and yet want to keep us ignorant that we are His? Can we live without this sense of certainty, and convince ourselves that it does not matter? We came to a definite answer on all these questions. It might have been more devout to have avoided answering them, and temporized with our clamorous hearts by concluding that God would

give, or withhold, according to His good pleasure. Instead of that we said: "God does not intend us to be wistful all our days. He wants us to be sure of His forgiveness and His love. If we are to live without this sense of certainty, we shall be as birds with a broken wing."

And that was where the old Methodist hymns came in. To this plain conviction that God wishes us to be sure, they added the impressive witness of men and women who *were*. What joy it was—and is—to read those hymns over and over again. Even in the days when one had so little experience out of which to sing them, and sang them, therefore, with a sense of unreality, one always knew that the unreality was in oneself, and not in the hymn. God wills this thing. Godly men and women have enjoyed it. These were milestones on the pilgrimage, and definite steps toward certainty.

Everybody has had the experience of hearing a voice call them from some absorbing task, and realizing, at their first response to it, that it had been sounding on the fringe of consciousness for some time before. One starts up with a guilty feeling, and finds the voice astonishingly loud the moment it becomes the focus of attention. I think it must have been like that when, at the first, the Spirit bore witness with our spirits that we were the children of God. Won to a fuller surrender, keeping the morning watch with the strictness of good soldiers, and prosecuting the search for certainty with the zeal of those who feel it is at hand, we became aware of an impression on the mind, a "comfortable voice," and inward assurance (these are poor phrases, but the truth breaks through language and escapes), yet as "absolute and luminously

self-evident," as Newman says the Creator was to his child mind. And as we regarded it, it grew clearer, and brought with it a sense of the most satisfying peace—not a peace to which we were foreign before, but richer in quality, reaching to the very heart of our need, and making us feel that the search for certainty was at an end. Even in that hour of relief and plenitude the individualism of it was present to our mind. Confirmation will be required for this, we thought. Reasons must be given—but only to *other* people. In the possession of this inward witness, the pursuit of reasons for oneself would be mere academics. Small wonder that those early Methodist hymns are full of such abounding confidence, and make such frequent use of the word "know."

Clearly, this experience lies behind Wesley's Sermon X. For this he battled with the Bishop of Lichfield and Mr. John Smith. And we are now in that succession—Methodists in more than name. "The witness in ourselves we have." Thank God, we are not without evidence that He is going to justify the rest of that quotation too. He is loosening the pride in us, removing those petty jealousies, and giving us grace to endure misrepresentation without bitterness. May He hasten the day when others can say of us what we shrink to say of ourselves, "And all its fruits they show."

It was when we came to tell others of this experience that we met with difficulty. Some were pained that we had not enjoyed it from our youth up, and others were pained that we had the temerity to claim it at all. It was bewildering to be found wrong in both quarters, but for precisely opposite reasons. To our first critics, we simply pleaded guilty. It was astonishing, but true. Yet, *surely,*

some excuse could be found. John Wesley, a better man than any of us, was thirty-five before the experience came to him. And, after all, had we not been born into an age when the very structure of society rocked with the greatest war in history, and the Church was making heavy weather after sixty years of Biblical criticism? We grew up in a generation in which the pulpit lacked the note of confidence. No wonder we were left in ignorance of our birthright, and suspected ourselves when the experience came. But it has come! For some time now we have been able to sing without a sense of unreality, "What we have felt and seen, with confidence we tell."

It is with the other critics that we find it hardest to come to terms—those who marvel at our presumption in claiming the experience at all. We have been reminded that "so great a man" as Newman denied the possibility of this inner witness. We have been told that this claim flouts the common sense of ordinary men, who feel upon this subject just what Quiller-Couch suggests that Hetty Wesley felt:

"Of a way to forgiveness through faith (though she must have heard of it a hundred times) she scarcely thought; still less of a way through faith to instant assurance. To those who have not traveled by that road its end—though promised on the honor of God and proclaimed incessantly by those who have traveled and found it—seems merely incredible. Hardly can man or woman, taught from infancy to suspect false guides, trust these reports of a country where to believe and to have are one."[2]

[2] A. T. Quiller-Couch. *Hetty Wesley,* p. 176.

Even in Methodist circles we have been warned against the dangerous presumption of it, and told that it greases the path to spiritual pride. There is a strident note in those who claim it, we are told—a hard, unyielding dogmatism; an assertiveness and overconfidence that are not truly Christian. Let us admit at once that, if this were true, it would be very sad, for they are all grievous faults. Nor am I concerned to defend the extravagances of immature converts, and from the abyss of spiritual pride I shrink with loathing.

But let us set all these aberrations aside for the moment, and seek a simple answer on the main question. Is there such an inner witness? And, if there is, may we not proclaim our possession of it in no uncertain way? Is the appearance of pride so great that we must follow the example of Dr. Samuel Annesley, and carry it about like a guilty secret for forty years, but never preach it to a soul? Or, should we be so sobered by the extravagances of charlatans and novices that we hold our tongue? Must we be silent because a braggart shouts? Or is the confirmation of the Church so much more than mere confirmation that we must deny the voice in our own soul until "some man in robes" approves it? And, even if we seek to conceal it, what hope is there that we shall succeed? Like Johnson's philosophical friend, we shall find it rising again for all our efforts at repression, and, somehow, we cannot shake off the feeling that people are eager for that definite note. It would be as much a pose now to speak uncertainly, as it was once a pose to say that we knew.

One friend, who is wise in the things of God, has expressed the opinion that it is better to be uncertain of

God and humble, than certain of Him and proud. Quite so! But are we shut up to that alternative? May we not be certain and humble too? When Charles Wesley found his soul "unutterably full of glory and of God," did pride have a corner in it as well? I cannot think so. Great confidence in God and a sense of certitude, can be compounded with deep humility. He calls a worm His friend. There it is! A worm: a friend of God. Both. The wonder of it!

So we preach Assurance, like the early Methodists, as "the common privilege of Christians." We know its real source. It is neither a "presumption of the natural mind, nor a delusion of the devil." The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

VIII
Is Christ Only a Partial Saviour?

ONE of the chief reasons for the impotence of the Church today is that there is not enough difference, to be impressive, between the people inside the Church and those outside. However hotly we might resist the criticism of outsiders, and however justly and cogently we may defend the fellowship of believers from the sneers of the scornful, we know in our own hearts that many of their darts have got home. We are not worthy to bear the badge of Jesus. So few of us, in our lives, set forth His true and lively word. So many of us are guilty of irritability, jealousy, pride, selfishness, anxiety, criticism, and indiscipline. It is no unusual thing to hear of angry church meetings. Instead of our differences being resolved by quiet waiting upon God, hot words are sometimes flung across the table and wounding things are said. Most of us know churches that are little more than a collection of cliques.

It would be folly, of course, to suggest that this was the whole truth, and it would be rank disloyalty to say such things outside. Within the family, however, and within the pages of a book written for the denomination, they may be said without offense. Most of us are sub-Christian. Our declining membership would not distress us deeply if those who remained were virile disciples; and if those who remained were virile disciples, our membership would soon cease to decline.

What is wrong with the Church? How comes it that the gates of hell prevail against us?

That something is really wrong is borne out by the repeated announcements of most evangelists today that their mission is to the Church. So far from seeking the outsider, some of them make no secret of their wish that, for the time being at least, he may remain outside. Many churches are simply not fit to receive new converts, they say. Newborn Christians would speedily die in so chill and unnourishing an environment. Hence, they conceive their task as a mission to a slumbering and waning Church.

But to criticize the Church is to criticize ourselves. David did not more condemn himself when his anger rose at the story of Nathan than I condemn myself in putting these charges down, or any other man condemns himself whose opinion I constrain to my own. The world is not so essentially evil that it cannot recognize the highest quality of life when it sees it. Sin has not so completely cankered the heart of humankind that it can resist forever the appeal of saintly lives. A higher quality of life in ordinary Christians is our most urgent need. If it is not blasphemous to speak of "establishing" the Church in the eyes of the world, it may be said that nothing would so achieve that end as the plain, demonstrable fact that the common Christian lived the life of victory, forgave injuries, was sweet of temper, humble of heart, free from worry, and glowed with the fire divine. *We want more saints.* They do indeed make it easy for others to believe in God.

The most bitter opponents of Christianity in Ancoats could not gainsay the faith while Frank Crossley lived there. The most loyal Hindus had no artifice to withstand the appeal of C. F. Andrews, and gave his initials

new meaning when they called him Christ's Faithful Apostle. Even the ranks of Tuscany can scarce forbear to cheer. The life of Jesus, seen again in His disciples, is potent. More of it would make a half-impotent Church mighty.

Is this our error? Immersed in the struggle to keep the institution going, have we ceased to make saints? Have we even ceased to *try?*

The early Methodists did not fail here. They did try. No one can read the classic literature of Methodism without being impressed by their pursuit of holiness. Salvation with them was more a beginning than an end. They wanted the refining fire to go through their hearts and sanctify the whole. It was Wesley's own constant insistence. He urged his people everywhere to "press on to perfection." He cast it into doctrinal form and said that "this doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists, and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appears to have raised us up."

How odd the neglect of modern Methodism appears in the light of a comment like that! The doctrine which their founder called the "grand depositum," and the preaching of which he believed had more to do with the development of the movement than any other, is largely neglected today. The people who keep it alive are in danger of being called "cranks" in their own communion. How just the imputation is I have no way of judging, but I suspect it to be a slander. No one can deny this, at least, that the early records of Methodism are on their side.

Are we called to a re-presentation of this doctrine? Is our most urgent need to pursue the holy life ourselves,

and constrain others to the same quest? Even while aspects of this topic are definitely obscure, is there not enough of it pellucidly clear to press upon the people, and would anything do more for the revival of the Church? Would anything else do as much?

The prejudice against this doctrine of perfection is widespread and deep. The mere mention of it in conversation is apt to startle someone into warnings about its dangers. But are those dangers insurmountable? If clear distinctions, plain exposition, and earnest advocacy could issue in a deepened spiritual life for the whole Church, are we not called to attempt it, and should not the difficulty only provoke our best thought and endeavor?

That it is a difficult doctrine no one will deny who has seriously pondered upon it at all. Even Wesley's logical mind failed to reach coherence with it—a failure of which he was not entirely unaware himself. It was an aspect of this problem which provoked him to the candid admission, "I confess I cannot split this hair." His most sympathetic and scholarly commentators have found it impossible to harmonize all his statements on this point.

Nevertheless, the preciousness and centrality of this teaching to Wesley's mind it would be impossible to exaggerate. In the hour when he was least satisfied with his exposition, he was most positive about the experience. If he did not claim it in so many words for himself, he exulted in its presence in Fletcher of Madeley, and in hundreds of obscure Methodists scattered all over the country. He never wearied of insisting that Methodism grew where this doctrine was preached, and declined where it was ignored. And *this doctrine is not preached today.*

Some thinkers appear to believe that the theologians are chiefly responsible for this neglect. The preacher cannot be blamed, they say, for not expounding a doctrine which the doctors of the Church have not elucidated themselves; and there is some justice in their criticism. Nevertheless, it remains true that in Dr. H. W. Perkins's *The Doctrine of Christian Perfection,* and still more in Dr. R. Newton Flew's *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology,* our Methodist theologians have grappled with this problem and given us the substance of a message. But more work is called for. The gulf between the scholar and the ordinary church member should be bridged. The *history* of the doctrine, which is Doctor Flew's main preoccupation, could be left aside. The actual pursuit of the holy life by the people called Methodists is our aim. By sermon, pamphlet, and handbook we need to lead our people on this quest.

Whatever remains uncertain on this subject, there are other things about it which we can say most definitely. Our people speak of "getting on" when they get a car or move to a larger house. The values of the world have subtly seduced their hearts. How can we make them to see with wide eyes that the only "getting on" that matters is their progress in the holy life—that the hour of unspeakable joy is the hour when they realize that they have the victory over an old sin, or receive into their willing hearts some new grace? How can we constrain them not to sojourn but to abide in Christ?

It would certainly be banal, and might even be blasphemous, to imply that the motive of such a quest would be to make the Church more impressive in the world. Holiness must be pursued for itself alone, and because

God wills it. But it *would* make the Church more impressive in the world. Sanctity cannot be ultimately resisted. The miners of Madelay, who began by planning violence against Fletcher, streamed noiselessly past his bedroom door, when he lay dying, in silent tribute, but could not catch a glimpse of the holy man because their eyes were blinded by tears.

Objections will be raised to all this, of course, and many of them cogent objections not easily answered.

The preaching of sanctification as an instantaneous act of grace does seem to savor more of magic than religion. When, in my pursuit of an understanding of this doctrine, I turned from the big books to the little books and began to read Commissioner S. L. Brengle, of the Salvation Army, I recall now my astonishment at the opening sentence of his "Helps to Holiness"—"On January 9, 1885, at about nine o'clock in the morning, God sanctified my soul." And when I began to inquire of some who claimed this experience, and they told me that sin could be "eradicated" in a moment, I could only sadly feel that they did not seem to mean by sin the same thing that I meant.

Surely Doctor Sugden is right here. John Wesley and many modern exponents of this doctrine think of sin as "a *thing* which has to be taken out of a man like . . . a rotten tooth." If only it were! But sin is part of me; it is in my very nature. Whenever I say "I," I say sin. Charles Wesley understood. He said:

> "Show me, as my soul can bear,
> The depth of *inbred* sin."

Yet no one sang more convincingly of the possibility

and experience of sanctification than Charles Wesley himself. A dozen hymns leap to the memory, in which both the longing for it and the enjoyment of it find majestic expression, an enjoyment not relegated to another life, but clearly held as being possible here.

"I want the witness, Lord,
That all I do is right,
According to Thy will and word,
Well-pleasing in Thy sight.

"I ask no higher state;
Indulge me but in this,
And soon or later then translate
To my eternal bliss."

But it cannot be denied that no doctrine ever expounded brought a man nearer to the abyss of pride. He need not fall in. But it is unmistakably a wind-swept summit which a man can hold only on his knee. Why do I shudder when a man says that he is fully sanctified? I am quite prepared to believe that the fault is in me—but I *do* shudder. I remember a candidate telling us once in the Committee for candidates for the ministry that he would be concealing the truth from us if he did not say that he was fully sanctified. It did not damage his candidacy, but I can hear again the general gasp with which the announcement was greeted. Is it some reaction of this sort that explains the recent criticism of our doctrine by Dr. Günther Dehn at Oxford? This eminent Lutheran theologian described the Methodist doctrine of entire sanctification as a "dangerous error." I am convinced that Doctor Dehn is wrong, but I wish the best minds of our Church could be given widely to the exposition of this part of our inheritance, and its

advocacy not left (with a few noble exceptions) to people whose reading is very limited, and whose stridency is not easily distinguished from spiritual pride.

I have sometimes thought that half our difficulty with the doctrine turns upon our definition of sin, and Dr. Henry Bett, and others, seem to me to be right in their plea for a clear demarcation (in thought, at least) between *sin* and *sinfulness*.[1] Define sin with Dr. F. R. Tennant[2] as "a voluntary transgression of a known law" and part of the problem disappears at once. "Unconscious sin," a phrase beloved of some theologians, seems more than a misnomer to me: it appears to carry a contradiction in its very heart.[3]

This distinction would clear up another obstacle to my thinking.

The finest souls I have known never claimed to be sanctified. I think they would have cut short the bare suggestion with a look of horror.

Most of the men who have influenced me through their books (though not all) were similarly innocent of such a claim. I know that Alexander Whyte urged his students to study Wesley and Law on Perfection, but he urged them most to read their own "evil hearts." None can deny that he read his. The holy man was appalled to the last by the sin in him. Dear old John Denholm Brash called himself "a hound of hell." These saints

[1] H. Bett. *The Spirit of Methodism,* p. 158—a book published after the preparation of most of these pages, but urging, particularly in the final chapter, the argument maintained here. It is rich in helpfulness.

[2] F. R. Tennant. Compare *The Origin and Propagation of Sin* and *The Concept of Sin.*

[3] R. E. D. Clarke. Compare for example, *Conscious and Unconscious Sin.*

were thinking of *sinfulness.* The first (though not the whole) concern of the Methodist doctrine is with *sin.*

So the questions confront us still, but I cannot think that they need ultimately defeat us. I am keenly aware that this slight discussion of the problem will clear up no one's difficulties, and I appear merely to have set point against point and drawn no conclusion. But some experience of it is urging me on, and deep theology can hardly be dealt with in this limited space, even if I had the equipment and, in frankness, it was another hope I nursed in my heart. Can we not turn our *attention* to it in Methodism? It would be no slight gain if we marshaled the things concerning it of which we are sure, and went in its full quest. Harder thinking at this part of our message, and a plea to our people to pursue the holy life, is urgently called for. But the plea must not be vague. Concrete help and detailed direction can be given. The man who waves aside the whole question impatiently because someone he knew (or heard of) claimed to be sanctified and was a patent and egregious sinner, is not to be tolerated. We have all heard such tales. Do we abandon razors because some people cut their throats with them?

God desires this thing. "He wills that we should holy be." He has dealt with the gross sins in most of us, if we were ever prone to them. We do not get drunk, swear, steal, or covet our neighbor's wife. He is able and willing to deal with the sins of the mind as well. He can purge us from ill temper, harshness, grumbling, fretfulness, selfishness, and pride.

What might He not do with a Church really bent on doing His holy will!

IX

A Plea for Personal Evangelism

IN 1936 the percentage of charges in the Methodist Episcopal Church by areas which reported no members received from Preparatory Membership or on Confession of Faith was: Cincinnati, 16 per cent; Washington, 22; Pittsburgh, 22.2; Detroit, 23; Philadelphia, 24; Chicago, 25; San Francisco, 26; Chattanooga, 28.8; Atlanta, 29.1; Kansas City, 29.2; Portland, 31; Saint Paul, 33.1; Omaha, 33.3; Denver, 36; New York, 37; New Orleans, 41; Boston, 45; Columbus, 53.

It used to be that by such announcements a Conference would be deeply stirred. Postponing or dismissing other considerations, with a sense of the fear of God, they turned their whole minds to the subject, and with contrite hearts asked themselves, "What measures can we adopt for the increase of spiritual religion among our churches and congregations, and for the extension of the influence of the gospel in our communities?" No one who has a recollection of one of these heart-searching times can forget the note of deep concern that was underneath all that was said, the plainness and rebuke of words which came straight from the heart of godly men who knew their business, and were certain of the willingness of God to use them if they were fit to be used. Now reports of decreases when read in Conferences are received as customary, not with a yawn, but as being something of a bore.

Even when comment is made from the chair, how little is there of the soul-searching so characteristic of a few years ago!

I am impressed by what seems an astonishing thing. Methodism has come to leave evangelism largely to men who are thought to have special gifts for it. When the Church grew most rapidly, evangelism was *not* left to the specially gifted.

To win conversions was the constant aim of the preachers in their own churches. All serious Methodists, lay and ministerial alike, felt the concern for souls, and seekers "were brought into the class meeting and there found salvation."

We are not inclined to condemn, but we are quite certain about one thing—*Ichabod* will be written over Methodism if she does not cease to trifle with her chief task. Raised up to evangelize, she has neglected her high calling, and left to the few what was once the occupation of the many.

The ebbing tide can be shown like this. Evangelism has passed from the member to the preacher, and from the preacher to the traveling preacher, and from the traveling preacher to a special order of men who can be called in for ten days to do what the local church tacitly admits that it cannot do. I wonder how the Leaders' Meeting in early Methodism would have received the suggestion that they should have "a mission," and that someone outside should be called in to lead it. Bewilderment would have sat on every face because, in Methodism's spacious days, her whole activity was a mission, and every Methodist admitted in principle, if he did not

always achieve in practice, the obligation to pass the glad news on.

But times have changed. The snobbish idea spread that culture and hot evangelism did not go together—and Methodists were terribly anxious to be known as cultured. There has been much silly talk about "special gifts." It is not long since I conducted a retreat for preachers, and pressed the need and joy of evangelism upon them. But, alas, preachers though they were, they all modestly disclaimed the title of "evangelist," and quoted Saint Paul to prove that there are diversities of gifts. What their own special gift was I did not inquire, but, fine fellows though they were, none of them could remember when they last led a man to Christ. Evangelism was a "special gift," and the Lord had not given it to them.

So it goes on. The humility of it is quite disarming. Who is to blame? Is it the Lord? I cannot read of any patter like this about special gifts in the early days of Methodism, but preacher and people did the work together. It would seem that today we must look upon the evangelist as a rare bird—which is very queer when one looks at the Cross and remembers how earnestly God is longing to redeem. And what hope is there of the people returning to the joyous toil of personal evangelism if only the exception among the preachers sees that the obligation rests upon him?

I am open to correction on the point, but I have drawn the inference from much talk with my ministerial brethren that they have little faith now in "special missions." My own conviction is that such efforts are an utterly inadequate response to the great need for evangelism, and

that, while they might serve a complementary purpose in a Church wholly given to this great task, they are a pitiable substitute.

These are the reasons:

1. So few of the "converts" stand. Arthur Porritt gives the figures of an evangelistic campaign in Birmingham into which Dr. J. H. Jowett was drawn. Two thousand five hundred people professed conversion under the visiting evangelist; about two thousand filled in a card expressing a desire to join Carr's Lane. A thorough visitation was undertaken, which unhappily reduced the number to thirty people, and seven finally joined the church!

That is a very extreme case. But how many of us who have joined in such efforts and honestly, before God, tried to garner the reapings, have found the thousand become hundreds, and the hundreds tens?

The evangelist always puts the blame for this on the local people who have not "followed up." Apportioning blame is a useless business, but traveling evangelists have long known of this grave defect in the work. Doubtless they have often asked themselves whether or not it was right to go on begetting babies into the Christian family when there was such an awful mortality among them. I have conducted missions and also organized the "follow-up." The latter is the infinitely harder task.

2. Many people who are reported as "conversions" have done nothing more than register desire. The very phrases some evangelists employ lead to misunderstanding. People are invited to stand up, or come forward, or sign a card, if "they want to be better." Who doesn't? The

most sodden sot in the corner saloon wants to be better; that longing lingers in the heart of every daughter of shame. With pathetic pluck they come forward and hope that a miracle will change them suddenly and break the power of evil habit in their soul. But what so often happens is that the evangelists say a few kind words to them and they go out as they came in.

I once met a minister who had received a packet of decision-cards from the promoters of a great evangelistic mission. He was asked to shepherd the people who had signed the cards enclosed because they lived in his district. The first card he examined was signed by his own deaconess. He spoke to her about it.

"Sister," he said, "we have been colleagues together in this work. We have been intimate and happy in our fellowship. If you were in some spiritual need, why didn't you come to me?"

"Oh," she said, "I wasn't in any particular spiritual need. The evangelist asked those of us to stand up who wanted to be better. Well, I want to be better. That is all that means."

And it would not be so bad if all those who come in that way were deaconesses, who knew God for themselves, and were merely saying aloud,

> "A point my good, a drop my store,
> Eager I ask, I pant for more."

Unhappily, many that come are in acute personal need —defeated by some ugly sin in their own interior life, needing the most individual, and sometimes expert help; and they are saying no more by their brave publicity than "Lord, help me." To call them all "converted" is

absurd. It is as though a doctor went into the crowded out-patients' department of the hospital and asked the poor sufferers, in all their variety of need, if they wanted to be better and, on receiving the assurance that they did, sent them home saying that it was done. No doctor is so heartless. One by one he sees them, asks their symptoms, bends all his knowledge to their need, and patiently removes the obstacles in nature's healing way.

Can the doctor of souls be less patient, or individual, as he seeks to find and remove the barriers to God's renewing grace?

3. While we gladly and thankfully acknowledge whatever abiding results have accrued from mass evangelism (Moody's admirers say that he "reduced the population of hell by a million souls"), we think it important to remember that it is a very solemn thing to give a man the idea that he is converted, and then leave him to discover how slight a change (if any) has been wrought in his soul. Even a swift ten minutes in the inquiry room seems pitiably inadequate to deal with the matted problems of a badly defeated life.

It is sometimes assumed that a ten-days' mission and a hundred signed cards are all worth it if the abiding result is the salvation of *one* notorious sinner. I have never been able to give an easy acquiescence to that reasoning. I have a fear that the other ninety-nine may have suffered some deep hurt, and think afterward that they were tricked into an open avowal that led to nothing. Afterward they say, sometimes pathetically and sometimes with a sneer: "Conversion? I've been through that. There's nothing in it." They will be harder to win to Christ now than they were before. Surely there is a way of win-

ning that notorious sinner, and salvaging the others at the same time.

4. But the chief objection to these special missions by visiting evangelists is that it fosters the idea that such a work is the occupation of people with special gifts. I have learned to dislike this talk of special gifts. Men angle for a job because it is in the line of their "special gift," or they decline a call to service because it is not in the line of their "special gift." And Methodism trifles with her chief task because so many have sought a refuge from the challenge of evangelism by pleading that it requires a special gift, which the Lord has not given to them. Is it so very difficult to put in a simple, natural, direct, personal and loving plea for Christ?

To attract and hold an immense congregation may always be the achievement of men with a special gift, but that is not the Church's chief need. Her chief need is evangelism, and God is ready to equip and lead any listening disciple into this urgent and fruitful work.

How hard it must be for God, trying to redeem a world, and encumbered by people with, and without, "special gifts"! For God's sake, let us get this right. It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves. So much of this simpering is merely a limitation of our surrender. He knows what we can and cannot do. Let us leave it to Him both to guide and to equip.

So we come to a plea for personal evangelism led by the minister of every Methodist church and heartily sustained by his people. It is far from my mind to suggest that mass evangelism has achieved nothing, and I shall be seriously misunderstood if that inference is drawn from my words. But it is my iron conviction

that personal evangelism was the normal method in the New Testament and in early Methodism, and that it is a demonstrably more excellent way. It may mean another journey to the Cross. It may mean the most rigid self-examination to discover if there is some individual problem filching our power to serve, and it must work itself out first in the church. The fellowship must be rich enough and warm enough to nourish the life of those newborn in Christ.

Verdicts may be won in the very act of preaching, and those who listen to God know when they must make a public appeal, but the preaching will still be effective if it only creates desire. Indeed, that will be its normal fruit. Human need is so individual that (exceptions allowed for) the minister will not expect people to leap in one stride from darkness to light. He will rejoice when the grace of God uses his preaching to beget a longing in their soul and they come and ask the way.

To that end, let him put a fence around one evening of his week, and shut the study door to all but seekers and those keen to grow in the spiritual life. Let it be understood in the church that those hours are sacred to people needing private help, anxious to unburden their heart of sin, anxious to be found of God, anxious to be spiritually disciplined and taught to pray. Every bit of sound ministerial training will be called into play, and the work itself will teach him ever more. It would be idle to deny that psychology is specially helpful, though no man need hesitate to do this work for fear that he is ill equipped to cure a neurosis. If he can *recognize* it, it is enough. He can direct the sufferer to a Christian psychologist, and give the more time to

the greater number of people who do not need psychotherapy but certainly need Christ. The sense of impotence will fall from him, and, costly though the toil will be, he will take his tired way home after every night with a singing heart, and in his soul he will say: "I was ordained to do this. In hours like these, I *am* a minister of God."

The most glorious consequences will flow from this. Depression vanishes from the heart both of preacher and people who have among them men and women newborn in God. The gloom which has settled on so many ministers and churches can be traced to this. They have not seen the gospel *work* for years. Success is being judged by the size of congregations and, while that is not a thing to despise, it is not an acid test of the gospel, for some men may never see the crowd. It leads us back, moreover, to the excuses of "special gifts."

Let a man go again to Christ and face any moral and spiritual cleansing that His Lord may impose. Let him seek guidance concerning the *one* person to whom he is to turn with his witness, and let him prove his gospel in *one* life. It would blast unbelief as by dynamite. To see *one* life revolutionized by Jesus would revolutionize the service of some despairing men. It would revolutionize the local church. It is amazing how large a small congregation looks when it includes the shining faces of new disciples, and the enheartenment it gives to the whole church can hardly be exaggerated. The gospel works! The most staid of members has a halleluiah in his heart.

Colleagueship with the spiritually keen people of his church will be one of the blessed by-products of this

work. There will exist such a deep fellowship and understanding between those who share this concern that the minister will not be left alone in this personal work, as though his office, or his training, gave him an exclusive right to care for souls. Rather will he be able to put needy people, whose problem is strange to him, in swift touch with those who have had deliverance from that very thing, and so utilize every scrap of sound experience in the church, and see his people grow as they give.

In such a church suppers and socials will not be the absorbing occupation. Nor will a "mission" be a rare interlude. The whole life of such a church will be a mission. Without strain or frenzy, but with quiet and constant earnestness, minister and people will work on, knowing their business and allowing nothing to divert them from it. The simplest soul who is living a victorious life will find that God has service for him to do. Though the church may not fill with eager seekers, the wheels of endeavor will turn as fast. Crowd or no crowd, they will go on. Luminously clear to them will abide the real purpose of the Church, and nothing will decrease their determination to have first things first.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it was generally understood that a Methodist church was a place where one went to get one's soul saved. Even those who spoke derisively of the "ugly bethels" were in no doubt of the clear purposiveness of the people who worshiped there.

If only we could win that reputation again!

X

A Minister to Ministers

HUGH PRICE HUGHES is credited with the saying that "the ministers hold Methodism in the hollow of their hand." The statement has been contested. Some laymen say that the phrase is a piece of egregious egotism, and a further evidence that ministers overmagnify their office.

Nevertheless, Hugh Price Hughes was right. Influence is not a solid to be measured by the yard, or weighed by the pound. The power of the minister is not well set out in lists of "privilege and prerogatives": it is subtle, pervasive, almost omnipresent. The responsibility of leadership is his—and, if he fails here, no one can take his place without appearing impertinent. He presides at meetings, and can foster any policy upon which his heart is set. No one voice is heard more frequently in preaching: his convictions, his thoughts, even his moods, inevitably affect his message. They do more: they affect his public prayers. When our people meet for worship, the shadow of the minister is on the threshold of the holy of holies itself.

Important consequences flow from this. If a man is not utterly convinced of his message, a sense of uncertainty communicates itself to his words, blunts the cutting edge they might otherwise possess, and carries no conviction to the mind of his hearers. If he has not the victory over sin in his own life, it is impossible for him to speak convincingly of Jesus as a Saviour: he may

assert it as a fact, and do so the more vehemently in order to silence the challenge in his own soul, but there will be something hollow in his words. If he has not the peace that passeth all understanding, he is incapable of meeting the deep needs of the fretful harassed people who press him on every side. In no other calling does a man's own state of heart and mind matter so much. People can enjoy the works of Goethe without considering his morals. The songs of Burns will ever be popular, though many of them were begotten by illicit loves. Few people who enjoy Wagner's music care a bit about his relations with his wives. But how different with the minister of God! He *must* be convinced and sincere. He *must* walk with God in white. He *must* have deep and disinterested love for people.

I want to raise each of those statements as a question. If the ministers hold Methodism in the hollow of their hand, then there is some justice in turning first to them in the hour of her weakness. No one thing would do more for the Church in her time of need than a new access of spiritual power in the ministry.

I. *Are we sure of our message?*

It is no disloyalty to the brotherhood to say that many men are not, but it is important to understand just *why* they are not. Let us be clear about this. No other faith, or philosophy of life, has filched their hearts. They have not gone back on Jesus. He is playing second fiddle to no one in the minor music which echoes in their soul. Humanism, the only serious intellectual rival of Christianity in the thought of our age, is no worthy antagonist, and has not shaken, by itself, the confidence of many men.

They look about them in this mad world, and nothing is clearer than the utter folly of believing in mechanical "progress," and no hope so vain as that of supposing that we can save ourselves.

It is, rather, that the prevailing despair of our race has so invaded their minds that they feel certain about nothing. Man seems to be the pawn of mighty forces which he cannot control, even though he has had more than a little to do with their creation himself. He longs for peace, but war is on the way. He thinks armaments are a criminal waste, but millions are spent on them. He dreads an economic slump, but feels helpless to prevent it. Modern man honestly doubts his ability to put the world right, and has come to believe that the only thing in life is the living of it—and some of that unbelief has attacked the ministry too. Jesus is still the supreme example in the individual life. He has no rival, in their thinking, on questions of character and conduct, but they find it hard to prove His cosmic significance. The difficulty of relating the normal work of the ministry in any effective way to international events develops a sense of the futility of preaching, and men leave the pulpit wondering (in the words of one who has abandoned this vocation) whether it has any more effect upon world problems than "the patter of the rain upon the roof."

On nothing is the pulpit more united—and repetitive—today than the assertion that "Jesus is the only hope of the world," and yet those words are beginning to die on the preacher's lips, not because he really doubts them, but because it seems such a vague platitude to utter. How can he make this more than a trite equivalent of the obvious truth that if people love one another, they do not

kill one another? Meanwhile, the boom of the guns gets nearer and, not having the same assurance concerning the after life that his spiritual fathers had, he wonders if anything matters in a world which is bent on suicide. To ask men who are facing a dark prospect like that to concentrate on personal evangelism is like talking about the importance of physical fitness to a man in the cell of the condemned.

Yet that is precisely what I want to do. I believe that all problems are problems of human nature in the end. If we get behind the most complex international situation, we are forced to conclude that the really obstinate part of the difficulty is not the intellectual part (however flinty that may be) but the jaundiced spirit in which men come to it. If human nature were at its best, human ingenuity would find a way. If the heart of man were right, the mind of man would not fail him. Where is the spirit that makes war? It is not dispersed through the world like some vapor: it is not just existent in what the psychologist calls the "group mind." Trace it to its source, and you find it in the heart of *individual* men and women. This man fears: that woman hates. This man believes a lie: that woman is consumed with jealousy. Sin is entrenched in the hearts and minds of men and women, and there must sin be slain. Jesus said it long ago: "Out of the *heart* come forth evil thoughts, murder, . . ."

New nostrums and theories are not our chief need: evangelism is. On the background of a clear and keen exposition of our gospel our urgent business is to lead men to God. Why is Japan attacking China? A dozen reasons are given, but this is mine: Because there are not enough Kagawas in Japan.

Nothing is more amusing—and yet more tragic—than to notice the way people betray themselves in their comments on the international situation. I remember the nurse who complained to me about a sermon I preached on peace and war: "I didn't sleep any better for that," she said. I countered her criticism by saying that the aim of preaching was not to make people sleep, but "to wake the dead in half an hour." I invited her to explain what she most disapproved. And it came to this: What could one ordinary person do with questions so vast and difficult? Such sermons went over their heads, and left them bewildered and helpless in the face of forces they could not hope to oppose.

But when I asked her pointedly if there were anybody she disliked, she remembered at once. Her lip curled contemptuously, and she hissed out bitter and barbed words about her sister-in-law. A moment before she had complained that the problem was too remote, but one pointed question revealed it in her own heart. All the trenches of sin are dug in the human heart. That is where it must be fought. The evangelists are the advance column of all true human progress: the legislator is a camp follower. He merely casts into legal form such moral counsel as the people have been constrained, by other means, to accept. He has the least cause to develop the fashionable malady—the inferiority complex. Some legislators have come to see it themselves. Earl Baldwin said some time ago: "I confess I am not sure if a Wesley or a Saint Francis were to arise today, that to found a body of preaching friars would not be the best thing they could do for the world."

Many a man raves at Mussolini and Hitler who is both a Mussolini and Hitler in his own home. No minister need feel that he is remote from the big problems whose chief concern is to win men to God, and build them up in the faith. He will not expect that his own isolated advocacy will work a world revolution, but he may know, as the plain and sober truth, that every man won to God is another radiating center of true peace in a frantic world, another channel of Christ's sanity in this terrestrial madhouse, another means by which the Divine mind can express itself on earth. If it is a little, it is a little of the right thing. If all ministers would give themselves to this task, it would cease to be a little thing in *any* sense. Above and beyond its effects on this earth, its *eternal* consequences make this labor clearly supreme.

Two objections are commonly made to a plea for the primacy of personal evangelism in the life of every minister. It is said:

A. That the method is painfully slow as a means of world revolution.

B. That it seems to ignore the social implications of the gospel.

A. The method *is* slow—but it could be a great deal faster than it is. If all those who profess and call themselves Christians had the badge of Jesus on their lives, they would not need to seek opportunities to pass this message on: men would come and *ask* the secret of their victorious living. Nor need we wait to see the signs of world revolution till that distant day when all men are saved. It need not even wait for a majority. A minority of passionate God-directed disciples could begin at once to affect the history of the world.

And, if it is still maintained that the method is slow, we can only answer that it is the way of Jesus Christ. Half our present problems have been created by a passion for short cuts. Every misguided "patriot," or bloody assassin, who engineered a revolution, did so in the mistaken idea that he was taking a short and direct line to the golden age. Usually, they make a gory horror of their country in the way we are witnessing in Spain, and always they beget some dreadful entail of hate, which hides itself till a convenient season, and then bursts out in a counter-revolution of blood. It seems so much easier to bludgeon your way into the unwilling hearts of men, but Christ settled that question forever in Gethsemane. He took the way of the Cross. I can imagine that some of these impatient people who object to the method of personal evangelism as being too slow might have stopped Jesus on the Via Dolorosa to inquire the mission He was on. And He would say,

"I am going to die."

"To what purpose, Lord?"

"I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

Christ knew, as none else knew then, what long travail the world must endure before the appeal of the Cross would break the stony hearts of men—yet He took that way. Slow it might be, but no swifter way would do. The God who respects man's freedom must be infinite in patience. His followers, when they have done all they can, must have patience too.

B. It is said that to place the primacy on personal evangelism in a minister's life is to ignore the social implications of the gospel. The statement is not true.

No idea of salvation advocated here denies or ignores its social implications: it stresses them. But it insists on first things first. The great end of man is to know and glorify God: child welfare, slum clearance, and a living wage are inferences. No amount of jeering from people whose whole outlook on life is bounded by the grave, and who sing of "pie in the sky," can alter that priority. The gospel is a supernatural message: schemes for social improvement are involved in it, but it is not exhausted in schemes of social improvement. With the enlarged meaning of what salvation implies ever in mind, it is still the best service to society to win men to God.

Some preachers feel qualified to speak in detail of the economic ills of the age, and some of them may possess the qualifications which they claim. It is a limited service that the normal pulpit can give on these problems, though such service ought to be given insistently, courageously, and in scorn of the consequences. The preacher should do his part to make sure that these problems are not overlooked. It is a scandal that Christian people outside the depressed areas should be so ignorant of the burdens their countrymen carry, and acquiesce so easily in them. That a rich spiritual life can be lived on a pittance has been shown many times in the history of the faith, but this is no reason why the Church should be tepid in its zeal for those who suffer. Grubbing for the bread of this life leaves millions with little heart or time to seek the bread of any other life. To keep the conscience of the community sensitive, and active, is no slight service, and it is a service that the pulpit ought to discharge. If, in addition to this, the Church insists that the happiness and welfare of human beings must take

precedence of excess profits, and lends its aid to all efforts wisely calculated to help the unprivileged, it will be preparing for that true Christian sociology and economics which alone will answer Communism, and for which the world waits.

To social salvage work the Christian Church has long been committed. Orphanages, hospitals, homes for the aged poor, shelters for the destitute—these, and a score of similar philanthropies, it has nurtured from early times. But much of this work would be unnecessary if we had Christian sociology and economics. We want the principles of Jesus interpreted in their social implications by a master mind, and worked out to practical issues by devout men. Hundreds of Christian businessmen, on such understanding as they possess already, are attempting this task. The writer knows scores of commercial houses where the whole tenor of the work has been changed in the last ten years by the fact that the employer has been won to discipleship for Christ.

Yet personal evangelism remains primary for the minister even when social conditions are most in his mind. Christian sociology and economics are not likely to be beaten out first in a pulpit. Some profound (and, perhaps, professional) thinker will lead the way. He may be a youth at the moment—though destined to be greater than Marx. The man who leads him to discipleship will put all ages in his debt.

That, then, is our answer to the two objections pressed against this plea for personal evangelism. We plead for it again. The recurring sin of the Christian Church is to leave her evangelism to those whose gifts are of the heart, rather than the head, and God, in His longing to

redeem, makes use of whoever He can. But what mighty things He does when He has *both!* All the great figures in the evangelical succession—Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Wesley—were intellectuals, and three of them had spent years in lecturing. There is no necessary divorce between a keen mind and a hot gospel. To evangelize is our supreme business. As a partial, though immediate, response to the grave outlook in the Church at the present time, we suggest, therefore, this simple vow to any minister who cares to make it:

"I will offer Christ to at least one other person in conversation every week."

Slight as this service may seem to be, it is a direct thrust at the heart of the problem; it throws a revealing light on both our riches in Christ and our awful poverty alone, and it will do much to make our message incisive, effective, and thrilling to impart. Most of all, it will glorify God.

II. *Is our devotional life right?*

Almost all our usefulness in the ministry runs down to this in the end. If the minister has not the breath of God about him, his preaching lacks the quality the congregation needs most, and all his personal contacts are impoverished. It would not be easy for anyone to say just what he misses in the ministrations of such a man, and those living nearest to God would be the least likely to attempt it. But they would *feel* it. He would fail somehow to make them aware of God and the unseen world.

Yet, only those who have entered this calling, and are all the time coping with the claims of a heavy pastorate,

know how busy one can be. Before I entered the ministry I worked from 9:30 A. M. till 5 P. M.; now I work all the hours I am awake. Many ministers would say the same. Amazing, and perhaps shocking as it would appear to the laity, it is hard to find time to pray. Some men confess that most of their praying is offered in church services, and they come under the condemnation which Alexander Whyte uttered of those unworthy shepherds "who attempt flights of prayer in public of which they know nothing in private."

F. B. Meyer was on the way to being a distinguished minister, and was even busy conducting missions in different parts of the country, before his devotional life had any real order and discipline in it. He called it himself "spasmodic and fitful."[1] R. F. Horton makes a comment in this connection which throws a revealing light on preachers and their prayers. He says:

"The more I have known of popular and successful ministers, the more thankful I have been that God has spared me the snares, the feverish excitements, the overstrain, and the disappointments to which they are subjected.

"I wonder whether there is any example of a great preacher who is not torn and racked with anxieties and misgivings. On more than one occasion I have met such a preacher in the height of his power and influence, admired and envied by all his brethren, and I have found his own mind a prey to the most dismal shadows and discontent. Great and popular preachers are the modern martyrs of the Church. The strain on nerve and heart

[1] W. T. Fullerton. *F. B. Meyer,* p. 57.

makes life a purgatory: the good they do is secured at a cost to themselves which, if it were realized, would win the sympathy, and pity, of the whole Church."[2]

How much weight should be put upon this comment it is difficult to say. My own acquaintance with "great and popular preachers" does not confirm the experience of Doctor Horton. I find them men of constant and hard *work*, but not men living in "purgatory," subjected to "feverish excitements," and "racked with anxieties and misgivings."

Yet Horton meant something by his plain words. The popular preachers of his day were clearly not men who impressed a kindly observer as being filled by the peace of God, and "all quiet within." Even if there is an element of exaggeration in his judgment, he cannot possibly be taken to describe people who are poised, and quietly aware of their infinite reserves of power in God. It would be unjust to draw inferences from this about the devotional life of such men, but the whole background suggests a view of preaching, not as the confident announcement by a prophet of a message given by God, but as a superior form of entertainment, with more than a dash of self-display, by a man with an eye to his reputation. Anxieties and feverish excitements do not belong to men whose lives are hid with Christ in God. However full life may be, they greet you as men new come from the anteroom of heaven. The breath of God is about them all the time.

Nor should it be overlooked that Doctor Horton is passing judgment, not merely on the popular preachers

[2] R. F. Horton. *An Autobiography*, p. 235.

of his day, but on their less distinguished brethren. He says they "envied" the man of note. Does he mean what he says? Or is the word to be watered down to some pleasant and wholesome admiration? Is there jealousy in the ministry?

This is a dark thought against which we have struggled many times, and a question which we hardly dared frame to ourselves. But, if it is so, it would cast another beam upon our devotional life, and explain a lot. How can men who gaze much upon

> "The wounds which all our sorrows heal,
> That dear disfigured face,"

suffer this evil thing to linger in the heart? Is it thinkable that, if they looked daily and long into those "eyes majestic after death," jealousy could ever be more than a rare and awful twinge in a nature not yet fully sanctified? Is this a secret hindrance to the recovery of glorious teamwork in the ministry, and the rebirth of that fine but defaced word, "fellowship"? A deep devotional life would sweep out the shrinking inferiorities of one with the conceited superiorities of another: much time spent with God would put the microscopic differences in our gifts in their true relation: we should live in each other's lives: the success of one would be the success of all: that tonic sense of being "on the march" in a great campaign would weld us into "togetherness": without hypocrisy we could exult and sing:

> "The gift which He on one bestows,
> We all delight to prove;
> The grace through *every* vessel flows
> In purest streams of love."

To that end, I suggest this simple vow to any man who cares to take it:

"I will spend an hour in unhurried quiet with God every day.

III. *How much do we care?*

No vow can secure this. Emotion is not the slave of will. The yearning heart will be a glorious by-product of a deep devotional life, but I raise the question here because it is so provoking (and humiliating) to think over.

The work of the ministry can never be set out in lists of duties. A man can fulfill every bit of his routine with the regularity of a robot, but, if there is no costly love at the heart of it, to what does it come in the end? It would be overbold to suggest that love always wins a response: our Lord's own bitter experience of unreciprocated love would rebuke such optimism at once, and yet it would not be untrue to say that love *usually* wins a response. One of my professors sent me into the ministry saying, "Your people will love you as much as you love them." He was not suggesting that their love should be a *motive* for mine. On the contrary, he would have urged that they should be loved with no condition in mind at all: that the love should be so similar to that of God that it need not borrow a motive from anything—not even their acceptance of my message. He was thinking not of motives but simply of cause and effect. Normally, our people do love us as much as we love them. Care begets care. They cannot long resist a heart that yearns over them, and people who love are easily led. You did not love them *for* this. However green the pastures in which you meant to lead them, there would be

something of taint in any love that had a motive behind it. In prayer God gives you a coal from off His altar, and you love them for themselves alone. That coal seems to burn out the deep inbred selfishness of our nature, and to put a passion for others into the heart, not unlike the great white glow that burned in the heart of Jeremiah. You care! Sarcasms, flippancies, and contemptuous comments, all of which show in their simple way the shallowness of love within, drop out. More peace and joy in one's own heart sharpens the contrast with those who have neither, and deepens the longing to make them "taste and see." One reason why we do not care enough is to be traced through scamped devotions to an impoverished experience of our own. The thing we have ourselves is so poor that we cannot get hot in the effort to give it away. To turn over the pages of any newspaper and read of crime, divorce and suicide, and a hundred other indications of heaving unrest in the world, ought to stir us with longing to share what we have. How sick of each other people must be to drag their romance through a divorce court: how weary of life, to end it on the morning of a June day!

How much do we care?

A friend of a friend of mine started keeping guinea pigs in his sixties. He was not an old fool, though some people suspected that he was; he was a keen church-school teacher. He had tried, and tried again, to win a boy in his class, but could make no close contact with him. Then he learned that the lad kept guinea pigs, and he took up the same hobby to tunnel a way to his heart.

He cared!

How much do we care?

An old journalist has confessed that in his early days the thrill of his loved profession filling his mind, he went about his work saying to himself, "Fancy being *paid* to do this!" Once we felt like that. The joy of Jesus was reward enough for all the labor of preaching. God grant us those glowing days again!

EPILOGUE

(People vary considerably in their need of help in the devotional life and, for some, the following pages will have little value. Prayer, for them, is the simple outpouring of their heart to the Father and any "direction" would be an impertinence. This epilogue is not for them.

But others may find it not unhelpful for meditation and solemn resurrender of their lives on May 24, or on any other day when God leads them to its use. But all its value will be lost unless it is used unhurriedly, with many a pause for rigorous self-examination, and an ear open to God. Or a part may be taken at a time.

Vows are set down in plain words because it is my conviction that much spiritual aspiration ends in vague yearning, and it is important that we be quite explicit in the promises we make to God. We need method in Methodism and, most of all, in the devotional life.

Several quotations are used and their sources will be easily recognized.)

Let us reflect on John Wesley's description of a true Methodist.

"A Methodist is one who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart. One who loves the Lord with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. He rejoices evermore, prays without ceasing, and in everything gives thanks. His heart is full of love of all mankind, purified from wrath, envy, malice, and every unkind affection. His one desire and design of his life is not to do his own will but the will of Him that sent him. He keeps all God's Commandments from the least unto the greatest. He follows not the customs of the world, for vice does not lose its nature by becoming fashionable. He fares not sumptuously every day. He cannot lay up treasures upon earth, nor can he adorn himself with costly gold and apparel. He cannot speak evil of his neighbor any more than he can lie. He does good unto all men, neighbors, strangers, friends, and enemies."

"These are the principles and practices of our sect. These are the marks of a true Methodist."

If these are the principles and practices of our sect, let us ponder on them again, watching our hearts as we linger on each sentence and part of a sentence, lest we seek to evade their challenge by belittling talk of a standard "impossibly high."

• • • •

Let us consider four tests of a Christian proposed by John Wesley, and let us propose them now to our own hearts.

1. Have I the forgiveness of my sins?
2. Have I victory over sin, both outward and inward?
3. Have I a sense of the power of God in my life?
4. Have I found something which I feel a burning eagerness to pass on to others?

. . . .

Let us *meditate* on the words

"O let me commend my Saviour to you."

1. When did I last lead someone else to God?
2. When did I last *try?*
3. Is my hesitation born not of respect for another's privacy, but by the poverty of my own experience? Have I anything to give away?
4. Am I willing, if God guides me, to confess my faults to another and to speak (in the words of Wesley) "freely and plainly of the true state of my soul"?

. . . .

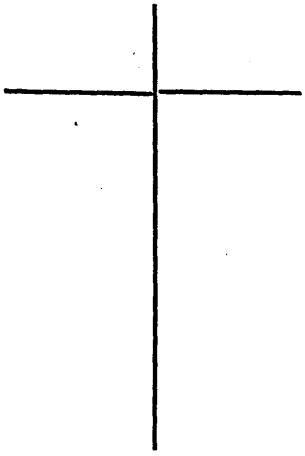
And now let us think on our sins.

Let us not heap our failures together in any vague and indefinite way. Let us name them, digging them out and looking at them, one by one, in the pure light of God: unholy thoughts, words, and deeds; unjust judgments; deep selfishness; meanness; sloth; jealousy; irritability; crude ambition; pride and prayerlessness. And what else . . . ?

Most Holy Father, my sins are such as sent my Lord to His Cross. I have no ground where I can stand before Thee save the greatness of the mercy revealed in that Cross.

I will go, then, to the Cross!

His Body, broken in my stead.



Forgiven greatly, how I greatly love!

The wonder—why such love to me?

I come, Lord; I believe, Lord; I throw myself on Thy grace and mercy. I have not whither else to go. Here I will stay, I will not stir from Thy door; on Thee will I trust, and rest, and venture myself. If I perish, I perish on Thy shoulder; if I sink, I sink in Thy vessel; if I die, I die at Thy door. Bid me not go away, for I will not go.

The Silence of Surrender.

I ACCEPT

I accept God's full and free forgiveness and take the Lord Christ as my Saviour.

I OFFER

By God's grace I offer myself to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall command.

My heart, my life, my all I bring
To Thee, my Saviour and my King.

I VOW

(*And here may follow any vow the disciple is ready to make. Do not let us pose even to ourselves. Let it be a pledge that grace and resolution* can *fulfil; and if it is made for one year or one month at a time, it will not overwhelm us and can be renewed. The following are intended only as examples which the disciple can use or vary as God leads him.*)

I will spend fifteen minutes (or thirty, or an hour) in quiet with God every day.

In my prayers, I will listen more than I speak.

I will commend my Saviour in simple conversation to at least one other person every week.

I will read the Bible daily.

I will join in some form of Christian fellowship weekly.

I will attend regularly the service of Holy Communion.

So help me God.

The Church of Pardoned Sinners
Exulting in their Saviour.

And the Lord added to them
day by day those that
were being saved.

. . . show Thy power
And myriads more
Endue with heavenly graces.

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